# MY AUTOBIOGRAPHY



Benito Mussolini

# *Benito Mussolini*

# MY AUTOBIOGRAPHY



Translated together with a Foreword by
RICHARD WASHBURN CHILD
American Ambassador to Italy

*With
Frontispiece
and thirty-one other
illustrations*

London:
HUTCHINSON & CO. (Publishers) LIMITED
34, 35 & 36 PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C. 4
1921

Printed in Great Britain at
*The Mayflower Press, Plymouth.* William Brendon & Son, Ltd.

# FOREWORD

IT is far from my purpose to elaborate the material in this book, to interpret it, or to add to it.

With much of the drama it contains I, being Ambassador of the United States at the time, was intimately familiar; much of the extraordinary personality disclosed here was an open book to me long ago, because I knew well the man who now, at last, has written characteristically, directly and simply of that self for which I have a deep affection.

For his autobiography I am responsible. Lives of Mussolini written by others have interests of sorts.

"But nothing can take the place of a book which you will write yourself," I said to him.

"Write myself?" He leaned across his desk and repeated my phrase in amazement.

He is the busiest single individual in the world. He appeared hurt as if a friend had failed to understand.

"Yes," I said, and showed him a series of headings I had written on a few sheets of paper.

"All right," he said in English. "I will."

It was quite like him. He decides quickly and completely.

So he began. He dictated. I advised that method, because when he attempts to write in long-hand he corrects and corrects and corrects. It would have been too much for him. So he dictated. The copy came back, and he interlined the manuscript in his own hand—a dash of red pencil, and a flowing rivulet of ink—here and there.

When the manuscript began to come to me, I was troubled because mere literal translators lose the vigour of the man himself.

"What editing may I do?" I asked him.

"Any that you like," he said. "You know Italy, you understand Fascism, you see me, as clearly as anyone."

But there was nothing much to do. The story came through as

it appears here. It is all his, and—what luck for all of us—so like him! Approve of him or not when one reads this book one may know Mussolini, or at least if one's vision is clouded know him better. Like the book or not, there is not an insincere line in it. I find none.

Of course, there are many things which a man writing an autobiography cannot see about himself, or will not say about himself.

He is unlikely to speak of his own size on the screen of history.

Perhaps when approval or disapproval, theories and isms, pros and cons, are all put aside, the only true measure of a man's greatness from a wholly unpartisan viewpoint may be found in the answer to this question:

" How deep and lasting has been the effect of a man upon the largest number of human beings—their hearts, their thoughts, their material welfare, their relation to the universe? "

In our time it may be shrewdly forecast that no man will exhibit dimensions of permanent greatness equal to those of Mussolini.

Admire him or not, approve his philosophies or not, concede the permanence of his success or not, consider him superman or not, as you may, he has put to a working test on great and growing numbers of mankind programmes, unknown before, in applied spirituality, in applied plans, in applied leadership, in applied doctrines, in the applied principle that contents are more important than labels on bottles. He has not only been able to secure and hold an almost universal following; he has built a new state upon a new concept of a state. He has not only been able to change the lives of human beings, but he has changed their minds, their hearts, their spirits. He has not merely ruled a house; he has built a new house.

He has not merely put it on paper or into orations; he has laid the bricks.

It is one thing to administer a state. The one who does this well is called statesman. It is quite another thing to make a state. Mussolini has made a state. That is superstatesmanship.

I knew him before the world at large, outside of Italy, had ever heard of him; I knew him before and after the moment he leaped into the saddle, and in the days when he, almost single-handed, was clearing away chaos' own junk pile from Italy.

But no man knows Mussolini. An Italian newspaper offered a

prize for the best essay showing insight into the mystery of the man. Mussolini, so the story goes, stopped the contest by writing to the paper that such a competition was absurd, because he himself could not enter an opinion.

In spite of quick, firm decisions, in spite of grim determination, in spite of a well-ordered diagrammed pattern and plan of action fitted to any moment of time, Mussolini, first of all, above all and after all, is a personality always in a state of flux, adjusting its leadership to a world eternally in a state of flux.

Change the facts upon which Mussolini has acted and he will change his action. Change the hypothesis and he will change his conclusion.

And this perhaps is an attribute of greatness seldom recognized. Most of us are for ever hoping to put our world in order and finish the job. Statesmen with some idea to make over into reality hope for a day when they can say, " Well, that's done ! " And when it is done,—often enough it is nothing. The bridges they have built are now useless, because the rivers have all changed their courses and humanity is already shrieking for new bridges. This is not an unhappy thought, says Mussolini. A finished world would be a stupid place—intolerably stupid.

The imagination of mere statesmen covers a static world.

The imagination of true greatness covers a dynamic world. Mussolini conceives a dynamic world. He is ready to go on the march with it, though it overturns all his structures, upsets all his theories, destroys all of yesterday and creates a screaming dawn of a to-morrow.

Opportunist is a term of reproach used to brand men who fit themselves to conditions for reasons of self-interest. Mussolini, as I have learned to know him, is an opportunist in the sense that he believes that mankind itself must be fitted to changing conditions rather than to fixed theories, no matter how many hopes and prayers have been expended on theories and programmes.

He has marched up several hills with the thousands and then marched down again. This strange creature of strange life and strange thoughts, with that almost psychopathic fire which was in saints and villains, in Napoleons, in Jeanne d'Arcs and in Tolstoys, in religious prophets and in Ingersolls, has been up the Socialist, the International, the Liberal and the Conservative hills

and down again. He says, " The sanctity of an ism is not in the ism ; it has no sanctity beyond its power to do, to work, to succeed in practice. It may have succeeded yesterday and fail to-morrow. Failed yesterday and succeed to-morrow. The machine first of all must run ! "

I have watched, with a curiosity that has never failed to creep in on me, the marked peculiarities, physical and mental, of this man. At moments he is quite relaxed, at ease ; and yet the unknown gusts of his own personality play on him eternally. One sees in his eyes, or in a quick movement of his body, or in a sentence suddenly ejaculated, the effect of these gusts, just as one sees wind on the surface of the water.

There is in his walk something of a prowl, a faint suggestion of the tread of the cat. He likes cats—their independence, their decision, their sense of justice and their appreciation of the sanctity of the individual. He even likes lions and lionesses, and plays with them until those who guard his life protest against their social set. His principal pet is a Persian feline which, being of aristocratic lineage, nevertheless exhibits a pride not only of ancestry but, condescendingly, of belonging to Mussolini. And yet, in spite of his own prowl, as he walks along in his riding boots, springy, active, ready to leap, it seems, there is little else feline about him. One quality is feline, however—it is the sense of his complete isolation. One feels that he must always have had this isolation—isolation as a boy, isolation as a young radical, adventurer, lover, worker, thinker.

There is no understudy of Mussolini. There is no man, woman or child who stands anywhere in the inner orbit of his personality. No one. The only possible exception is his daughter Edda. All the tales of his alliances, his obligations, his ties, his predilections are arrant nonsense. There are none—no ties, no predilections, no alliances, no obligations unpaid.

Financially ? Lying voices said that he had been personally financed and backed by the industrialists of Italy. This is ridiculous to those who know. His salary is almost nothing. His own family—wife, children, are poor.

Politically ? Whom could he owe ? He has made and can unmake them all. He is free to test every office-holder in the whole of Italy by the yardstick of service and fitness. Beyond that I know not

one political debt that he owes. He has tried to pay those of the past; I believe that the cynicism in him is based upon the failure of some who have been rewarded to live up to the trust put in them.

"But I take the responsibility for all," says he. He says it publicly with jaws firm; he says it privately with eyes somewhat saddened.

He takes responsibility for everything—for discipline, for censorship, for measures which, were less rigour required, would appear repressive and cruel. "Mine!" says he, and stands or falls on that. It is an admirable courage. I could, if I wished, quote instance after instance of this acceptance—sometimes when he is not to blame—of the whole responsibility of the machine.

"Mine!" says he.

And in spite of any disillusionment he has suffered since I knew him first, he has retained his laugh—often, one is bound to say, a scornful laugh—and he has kept his faith in an ability to build up a machine—the machine of Fascism—the machine built not on any fixed theory, but one intended by Mussolini to run—above all, to run, to function, to do, to accomplish, to fill the bottles with wine first, unlike the other isms, and put the labels on after.

Mussolini has superstitious faith in himself. He has said it. Not a faith in himself to make a personal gain. An assassin's bullet might wipe him out and leave his family in poverty. That would be that. His faith is in a kind of destiny which will allow him, before the last chapter, to finish the building of this new state, this new machine—"the machine which will run, and has a soul."

The first time I ever saw him he came to my residence some time before the March on Rome, and I asked him what would be his programme for Italy. His answer was immediate: "Work and discipline."

I remember I thought at that time that the phrase sounded a little evangelical, a phrase of exhortation. But a mere demagogue would never choose it. Wilson's slogans of Rights and Peace and Freedom are much more popular and gain easier currency than sterner phrases. It is easier even for a sincere preacher to offer soft nests to one's followers; it is more difficult to excite enthusiasm for stand-up doctrines. Any analysis and weighing of Mussolini's greatness must include recognition that he has made popular throughout a race of people, and perhaps for others, a standard of

obligation of the individual not only exacting, but one which in the end will be accepted voluntarily. Not only is it accepted voluntarily, but with an almost spiritual ecstasy which has held up miraculously in Italy during years, when all the so-called Liberals in the world were hovering over it like vultures, croaking that if it were not dead it was about to die.

It is difficult to lead men at all. It is still more difficult to lead them away from self-indulgence. It is still more difficult to lead them so that a new generation, so that youth itself, appears as if born with a new spirit, a new virility appearing as if bred in the bones. It is difficult to govern a state and difficult to deal cleanly and strongly with a static programme applied to a static world; but it is more difficult to build a new state and deal cleanly and strongly with a dynamic programme applied to a dynamic world.

This man, who looks up at me with that peculiar nodding of his head and raising of the eyebrows, has done it. There are few in the world's history who have. I had considered the phrase "Work and discipline" as a worthy slogan, as a good label for an empty bottle. Within six years this man, with a professional opposition which first barked like Pomeranians at his heels and then ran away to bark abroad, has made the label good, has filled the bottle, has turned concept into reality.

It is quite possible for those who oppose the concept to say that the reality of the new spirit of Italy and its extent of full acceptance by the people may exist in the mind of Mussolini, but does not spring out of the people themselves, but it is quite untrue, as all know who really know.

He throws up his somewhat stubby, meaty, short-fingered hands, strong and yet rather ghostlike when one touches them, and laughs. Like Roosevelt. No one can spend much time with him without thinking that after all there are two kinds of leaders—outdoor and indoor leaders—and that the first are somewhat more magnetic, more lasting and more boyish and likeable for their power than the indoor kind.

Mussolini, like Roosevelt, gives the impression of an energy which cannot be bottled, which bubbles up and over like an eternally effervescent, irrepressible fluid. At these moments one remembers his playing of the violin, his fencing, his playful, mischievous humour, the dash of his courage, his contact with animals, his

success in making gay marching songs for the old drab struggles of mankind with the soil, with the elements, with ores in the earth, and the pathways of the seas. In the sombre conclusions of the student statesman and in the sweetness of the sentimentalist statesman there is little joy ; unexpected joy is found in the leadership of a Mussolini. Battle becomes a game. The game becomes a romp. It is absurd to say that Italy groans under discipline. Italy chortles with it ! It is victory !

He is a Spartan. Perhaps we need Spartans in the world to-day ; especially that type whose first interest is the development of the power and the happiness of a race.

The last time I took leave of Mussolini he came prowling across the room as I went toward the door. His scowl had gone. The evening had come. There had been a half-hour of quiet conversation. The strained expression had fallen from his face. He came toward me and rubbed his shoulder against the wall. He was relaxed and quiet.

I remembered Lord Curzon's impatience with him long ago, when Mussolini had first come into power, and Curzon used to refer to him as " that absurd man."

Time has shown that he was neither violent nor absurd. Time has shown that he is both wise and humane.

It takes the world a long time to see what has been dropped into the pan of its old scales.

In terms of fundamental and permanent effect upon the largest number of human beings—whether one approves or detests him—the Duce is now the greatest figure of this sphere and time. One closes the door when one leaves him, feeling, as when Roosevelt was left, that one could squeeze something of him out of one's clothes.

He is a mystic to himself.

I imagine, as he reaches forth to touch reality in himself, he finds that he himself has gone a little forward, isolated, determined, illusive, untouchable, just out of reach—onward !

# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

# CONTENTS



# MY AUTOBIOGRAPHY

## CHAPTER I

### YOUTH

I WOULD have preferred to have called this "First Steps of Life."

Almost all the books published about me put squarely and logically on the first page that which may be called my birth certificate. It is usually taken from my own notes.

Well then, here it is again. I was born on July 29th, 1883, at Varano di Costa. This is an old hamlet. It is on a hill. The houses are of stone, and sunlight and shade give these walls and roofs a variegated colour which I well remember. The hamlet, where the air is pure and the view agreeable, overlooks the village of Dovia, and Dovia is in the commune or county of Predappio in the north-east of Italy.

It was at two o'clock Sunday afternoon when I came into the world. It was by chance the festival day of the patron saint of the old church and parish of Caminate. On the structure a ruined tower overlooks proudly and solemnly the whole plain of Forli—a plain which slopes gently down from the Apennines with their snow-clad tops in winter to the undulating bottoms of Ravaldino, where the mists gather in summer nights.

Let me add to the atmosphere of a country dear to me by bringing again to my memory the old district of

Predappio. It was a country well-known in the 13th century, giving birth to illustrious families during the Renaissance. It is a sulphurous land. From it the ripening grapes make a strong wine of fine perfume. There are many springs of iodine waters. And on that plain and undulating foothills and mountain spurs the ruins of mediæval castles and towers thrust up their grey yellowed walls towards the pale blue sky in testimony of the virility of centuries now gone.

Such was the land, dear to me because it was my soil. Race and soil are strong influences upon us all.

As for my race—my origin, many persons have studied and analysed its hereditary aspects. There is nothing very difficult in tracing my genealogy, because from parish records it is very easy for friendly research to discover that I came from a lineage of honest people. They tilled the soil, and because of its fertility they earned the right to their shares of comfort and ease.

Going further back one finds that the Mussolini family was prominent in the City of Bologna in the 13th century. In 1270 Giovanni Mussolini was the leader of this warlike, aggressive commune: his partner in the rule of Bologna in the days of armoured knights was Fulcieri Paolucci de Calboli, who belonged to a family from Predappio also, and even to-day that family is one of the distinguished families.

The destinies of Bologna and the internal struggles of its parties and factions following the eternal conflicts and changes in all struggles for power, caused, at last, the exile of the Mussolinis to Argelato. From there they scattered into neighbouring provinces. One may be sure that in that era their adventures were varied and sometimes brought them in the flux of fortune to hard times. I have never discovered news of my forebears in the 17th century. In the 18th century there was a Mussolini in London.

Italians never hesitate to venture abroad with their genius or their labours. The London Mussolini was a composer of music of some note, and perhaps it is from him that I inherit the love of the violin, which even to-day in my hands gives comfort to moments of relaxation and creates for me moments of release from the realities of my days.

Later, in the 19th century, the family tie became more clearly defined; my own grandfather was a lieutenant of the National Guard.

My father was a blacksmith—a heavy man with strong, large, fleshy hands. Alessandro the neighbours called him. Heart and mind were always filled and pulsing with socialistic theories. His intense sympathies mingled with doctrines and causes. He discussed them in the evening with his friends and his eyes filled with light. The international movement attracted him, and he was closely associated with names known among the followers of social causes in Italy—Andrea Costa, Balducci, Amilcare, Cipriani, and even the more tender and pastoral spirit of Giovanni Pascoli. So come and go men whose minds and souls are striving for good ends. Each conference seems to them to touch the fate of the world, each talisman seems to promise its salvation; each theory pretends to immortality.

The Mussolinis had left some permanent marks. In Bologna there is still a street named for that family, and not long ago a tower and a square bore the name. Somewhere in the heraldic records there is the Mussolini coat of arms. It has a rather pleasing and perhaps magnificent design. There are six black figures in a yellow field—symbol of valour, courage, force.

My childhood, now in the mists of distance, still yields those flashes of memory that come back with a familiar

scene, an aroma which the nose associates with damp earth after a rain in the springtime, or the sound of footsteps in the corridor. A roll of thunder may bring back the recollection of the stone steps where a little child who seems no longer any part of one's self used to play in the afternoon.

Out of those distant memories I receive no assurance that I had the characteristics which are supposed traditionally to make parents overjoyed at the perfection of their offspring. I was not a good boy, nor did I stir the family pride or the dislike of my own young associates in school by standing at the head of my class.

I was then a restless being; I am still.

Then I could not understand why it is necessary to take time in order to act. Rest for restfulness meant nothing to me then any more than now.

I believe that in those youthful years, just as now, my day began and ended with an act of will—by will put into action.

Looking back I cannot see my early childhood as being either praiseworthy or as being more than normal in every direction. I remember my father as a dark-haired, good-natured man, not slow to laugh, with strong features and steady eyes. I remember near the house where I was born, with its stone wall with moss green in the crevices, there was a small brook and farther on a little river. Neither had much water in them, but in autumn and other seasons when there were unexpected heavy rains they swelled in fury and their torrents were joyous challenges to me. I remember them as my first play spots. With my brother Arnaldo, who is now the publisher of the daily *Popolo d' Italia*, I used to try my skill as a builder of dams to regulate the current. When birds were in their nesting season I was a frantic hunter for their concealed

and varied homes with their eggs or young birds. Vaguely I sensed in all this the rhythm of natural progress—a peep into a world of eternal wonder of flux and change. I was passionately fond of young life, I wished to protect it then as I do now.

My greatest love was for my mother. She was so quiet, so tender and yet so strong. Her name was Rosa. My mother not only reared us, but she taught primary school. I often thought, even in my earliest appreciations of human beings, of how faithful and patient her work was. To displease her was my one fear. So to hide from her my pranks, my naughtiness or some result of a mischievous frolic I used to enlist my grandmother and even the neighbours, for they understood my panic lest my mother should be disturbed.

The alphabet was my first practice in worldly affairs and I learned it in a rush of enthusiasm. Without knowing why, I found myself wishing to attend school—the school at Predappio some two miles away. It was taught by Marani, a friend of my father. I walked to and fro, and was not displeased that the boys of Predappio resented at first the coming of a stranger boy from another village. They flung stones at me and I returned their fire. I was all alone and against many I was often beaten, but I enjoyed it with that universality of enjoyment with which boys the world around make friendship by battle and arrive at affection through missiles. Whatever was my courage my body bore its imprints. I concealed the bruises from my mother to shelter her from the knowledge of the world in which I had begun to find expression and to which I supposed she was such a stranger. At the evening repast I probably often feared to stretch out my hand for the bread lest I expose a wound upon my young wrist.

After a while this all ended. War was over and the

pretence of enmity—a form of play—faded into nothing and I had found fine schoolmates of my own age. The call of old life foundations is strong. I felt it when only a few years ago a terrific avalanche endangered the lives of the inhabitants of Predappio. I took steps to found a new Predappio—Predappio Nuovo. My nature felt a stirring for my old home. And I remembered that as a child I had sometimes looked at the plain where the River Rabbi is crossed by the old highway to Mendola and imagined there a flourishing town. To-day that town—Predappio Nuovo —is in full process of development; on its masonry gate there is carved the symbol of Fascism and words expressing my clear will.

When I was graduated from the lower school I was sent to a boarding school. This was at Faenza, the town noted for its pottery of the 15th century. The school was directed by the Salesiani priests. I was about to enter into a period of routine, of learning the ways of the disciplined human herd. I studied, slept well and grew. I was awake at daylight and went to bed when the evening had settled down and the bats flew.

This was a period of bursting beyond the bounds of my own little town. I had begun to travel. I had begun to add length after length to that tether which binds one to the hearth and the village.

I saw the town of Forli—a considerable place which should have impressed me but failed to do so. But Ravenna! Some of my mother's relatives lived in the plain of Ravenna, and on one summer vacation we set out together to visit them. After all it was not far away, but to my imagination it was a great journey—almost like a journey of Marco Polo to go over hill and dale to the edge of the sea—the Adriatic!

I went with my mother to Ravenna and carefully

visited every corner of that city steeped in the essences of antiquity. From the wealth of Ravenna's artistic treasures there rose before me the beauty and fascinations of her history and her name through the long centuries. Deep feelings remain now, impressed then upon me. I experienced a profound and significant enlarging of my concepts of life, beauty and the rise of civilizations.

The tomb of Dante inspiring in its quiet hour of noon, the basilica of S. Appolinaire, the Candiano canal with the pointed sails of fishing boats at its mouth, and then the beauty of the Adriatic moved me—touched something within me.

I went back with something new and undying. My mind and spirit were filled with expanding consciousness. And I took back also a present from my relatives. It was a wild duck, powerful in flight. My brother Arnaldo and I, on the little river at home, put forth patient efforts to tame—the wild duck.

My father took a profound interest in my development. Perhaps I was much more observed by his paternal attention than I thought. We became much more knit together by common interests as my mind and body approached maturity. In the first place, I became fascinated by the steam threshing-machines which were just then for the first time being introduced in our agricultural life. With my father I went to work to learn the mechanism and tasted, as I had never tasted before, the quiet joy of becoming a part of the working creative world. Machinery has its fascinations and I can understand how an engineer of a railway locomotive or an oiler in the hold of a ship may feel that a machine has a personality, sometimes irritating, sometimes friendly with an inexhaustible generosity and helpfulness, power and wisdom.

But manual labour in my father's blacksmith shop was

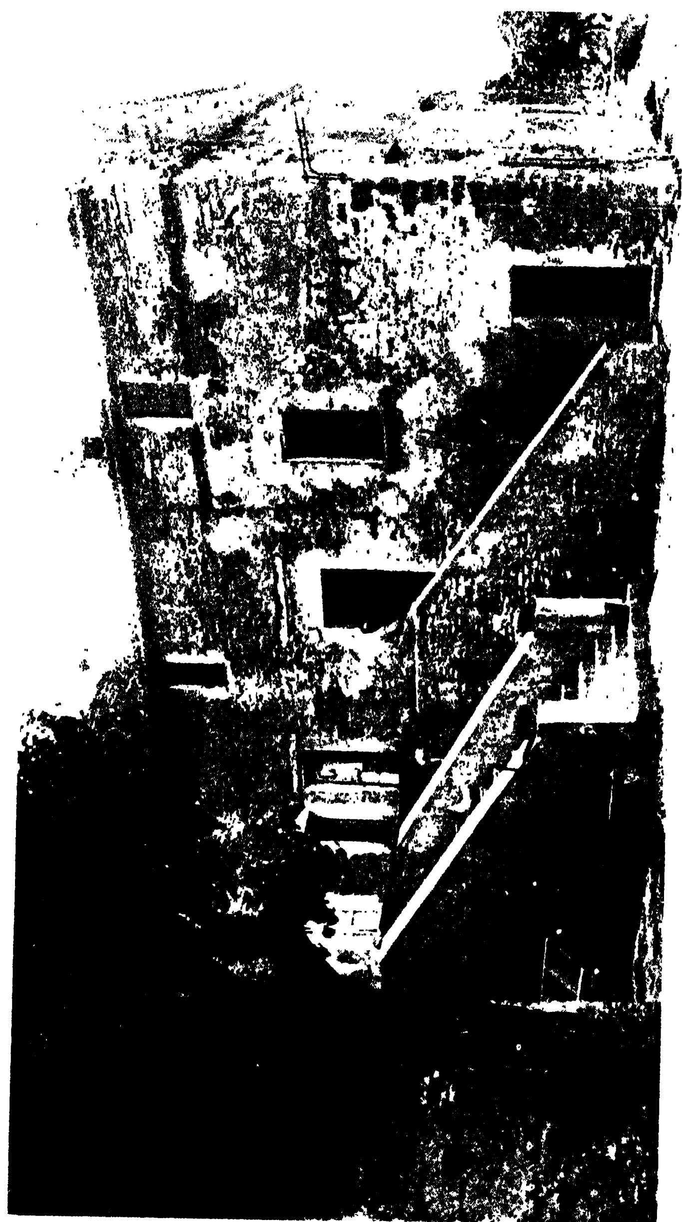
not the only common interest we shared. It was inevitable that I should find a clearer understanding of those political and social questions which in the midst of discussions with the neighbours had appeared to me as unfathomable and hence a stupid world of words. I could not follow as a child the arguments of lengthy debates around the table, nor did I grasp the reasons for the watchfulness and measures taken by the police. But now in an obscure way it all appeared as connected with the lives of strong men, who not only dominate their own lives but also the lives of their fellow-creatures. Slowly but fatally I was turning my spirit and my mind to new political ideals destined to flower for a time.

I began with young eyes to see that the tiny world about me was feeling uneasiness under the pinch of necessity. A deep and secret grudge was darkening the hearts of the common people. A country gentry of mediocrity in economic usefulness and of limited intellectual contribution were hanging upon the multitudes a weight of unjustified privileges. These were sad dark years, not only in my own province but for other parts of Italy. I must have the marks upon my memory of the resentful and furtive protests of those who came to talk with my father, some with bitterness of facts, some with a newly devised hope for some reform.

It was then while I was still in my early teens that my parents, after many serious talks ending with a rapid family counsel, turned the rudder of my destiny in a new direction.

They said that my manual work did not correspond to their ambitions for me, to their ability to aid me, nor did it fit my own capacities. My mother had a phrase which remains in my ears, " He promises something."

At the time I was not very enthusiastic about that



conclusion; I had no real hunger for scholastic endeavour. I did not feel that I would languish if I did not go to a normal school, and did not prepare to become a teacher. But my family were right. I have developed some capacities as a student and could increase them.

I went to the normal school at a place called Forlimpopoli. I remember my arrival in that small city. The citizens were cheerful and industrious, good at bargaining—tradesmen and middlemen. The school, however, had a greater distinction; it was conducted by Valfredo Carducci, brother of the great writer Giosuè Carducci, who at that time was harvesting his laurels because of his poetry and his inspiration drawn from Roman classicism.

There was a long stretch of study ahead of me; to become a master—to have a teacher's diploma meant six years of books and pencils, ink and paper. I confess that I was not very assiduous. The bright side of those years of preparation to be a teacher came from my interest in reforming educational methods, and even more in an interest begun at that time and maintained ever since—an intense interest in the psychology of human masses—the crowd.

I was, I believe, unruly. And I was sometimes indiscreet. Youth has its passing restlessness and follies. Somehow I succeeded in gaining forgiveness. My masters were understanding and on the whole generous. But I have never been able to make up my mind how much of the indulgence accorded to me came from any hope they had in me, or how much came from the fact that my father had acquired an increasing reputation for his moral and political integrity.

So the diploma came to me at last. I was a teacher! Many are the men who have found activity in political life who began as teachers. But then I saw only the

prospect of the hard road of job-hunting, letters of recommendation, scraping up a backing of influential persons and so on.

In a competition for a teacher's place at Gualtieri, in the province of Reggio Emilia, I was successful. I had my taste of it, I taught for a year. On the last day of the school year I dictated an essay. I remember its thesis—it was, "By persevering you arrive." For that I obtained the praise of my superiors!

So school was closed! I did not want to go back to my family. There was a narrow world for me, with affection to be sure, but restricted. There in Predappio one could neither move nor think without feeling at the end of a short rope. I had become conscious of myself, sensitive to my future. I felt the urge to escape.

Money I had not—merely a little. Courage was my asset. I would be an exile.

I crossed the frontier, I entered Switzerland.

It was this wander-life, now full of difficulties, toil, hardship and restlessness, that developed something in me. It was the milestone which marked my maturity. I entered into this new era as a man and politician. My confident soul began to be my support. I conceded nothing to pious demagoguery. I allowed myself, humble as was my figure, to be guided by my innate proudness and I saw myself in my own mental dress.

To this day I thank difficulties. They were more numerous than the nice, happy incidents. But the latter gave me nothing.

The difficulties of life have hardened my spirit.

They have taught me how to live.

For me it would have been dreadful and fatal if on my journey forward through the years I had by chance fallen permanently into the chains of comfortable bureaucratic

employment. How could I have adapted myself to that smug existence in a world bristling with interest and significant horizons? How could I have tolerated the halting progress of promotions, comforted and yet irritated by the thoughts of an old age pension at the end of the dull road? Any comfortable cranny would have sapped my energies. These energies which I enjoy were trained by obstacles and even by bitterness of soul. They were made by struggle; not by the joys of the pathway.

My stay in Switzerland was a welter of difficulty. It did not last long, but it was angular with harsh points. I worked with skill as a labourer. I worked usually as a mason and felt the fierce grim pleasure of construction. I made translation from Italian into French and *vice versa.* I did whatever came to hand. I looked upon my friends with interest or affection or amusement.

Above all I threw myself headforemost into the politics of the emigrant—of refugees, of those who sought solutions.

In politics I never have gained a penny. I detest those who live like parasites sucking away at the edges of social struggles. I hate men who grow rich in politics.

I knew hunger—stark hunger—in those days. But I never bent myself to ask for loans, and I never tried to inspire the pity of those around me nor of my own political companions. I reduced my needs to a minimum and that minimum, and sometimes less, I received from home.

With a kind of passion I studied social sciences.

Pareto was giving a course of lectures in Lausanne on political economy. I looked forward to every one. The mental exercise was a change from manual labour. My mind leaped toward this change and I found pleasure in learning. For here was a teacher who was outlining the fundamental economic philosophy of the future.

Between one lesson and another I took part in political

gatherings. I made speeches. Some intemperance in my words made me undesirable to the Swiss authorities. They expelled me from two cantons, Geneva and Lausanne. The University courses were over! I was forced into new places, and not until 1922 at the Conference of Lausanne, after I was Premier of Italy, did I see again some of my old haunts, filled with memories colourful or drab.

To remain in Switzerland became impossible. There was the yearning for home which blossoms in the hearts of all Italians. Furthermore, the compulsory service in the army was calling me. I came back. There were greetings, questions, all the incidents of the return of an adventurer —and then I joined the regiment. A Bersaglieri regiment at the historic city of Verona. The Bersaglieri wear green cock feathers in their hats; they are famous for their fast pace, a kind of monotonous and ground-covering dog-trot, and for their discipline and spirit.

I liked the life of a soldier.

The sense of willing subordination suited my temperament. I was preceded by a reputation of being restless, a fire-eater, a radical, a revolutionist. Consider then the astonishment of the Captain, the Major and my Colonels who were compelled to speak of me with praise! It was my opportunity to show serenity of spirit and strength of character.

Verona, where my regiment was garrisoned was, and always will remain, a dear Venetian city reverberating with the past, filled with suggestive beauties. It found in my own temperament an echo of infinite resonance. I enjoyed its aromas as a man, but also as a private soldier I entered with vim into all the drill and the most difficult exercises. I found an affectionate regard for the mass, for the whole, made up of individuals, for its manœuvres, and the tactics, the practices of defence and attack.

My capacity was that of a simple soldier; but I used to weigh the character, abilities and individualities of those who commanded me. All Italian soldiers to a certain extent do this. I learned in that way how important it is for an officer to have a deep knowledge of military matters and to develop a fine sensitiveness to the ranks, and to appreciate in the masses of our men our stern Latin sense of discipline and to be susceptible to its enchantments.

I can say that in every regard I was an excellent soldier. I might have taken up the courses for non-commissioned officers. But destiny, which dragged me from my father's blacksmith shop to teaching and from teaching to exile and from exile to discipline, now decreed that I should not become a professional soldier.

I had to ask for leave.

At that time I swallowed the greatest sorrow of my life; it was the death of my mother.

One day my Captain took me aside. He was so considerate that I felt in advance something impending. He asked me to read a telegram. It was from my father. My mother was dying! He urged my return.

I rushed to catch the first train.

I arrived too late.

My mother was in death's agony.

But from an almost imperceptible nod of her head I realized that she knew I had come. I saw her endeavour to smile. Then her head slowly dropped—and she had gone.

All the independent strength of my soul, all my intellectual or philosophical resources, even my deep religious beliefs, were helpless to comfort that great grief.

For many days I was lost.

From me had been taken the one dear and truly near living being—the one soul closest and eternally adherent to my own responses.

Words of condolence, letters from my friends, the attempt to comfort me by other members of the family, filled not one tiny corner of that great void, nor opened even one fraction of an inch of the Closed Door.

My mother had suffered for me—so many ways. She had for me lived so many hours of anxiety because of my wandering and pugnacious life. She had predicted my ascent. She had toiled and hoped too much and died before she was yet forty-eight years old. She had, in her quiet manner, done superhuman labours.

She might be alive now. She might have lived and enjoyed with the power of her maternal instinct my political success. It was not to be. But to me it is a comfort to feel that she, even now, can see me and help me in my labours with her unequalled love.

I, alone, returned to the regiment. I finished my last months of military service. And then—my life and my future were again distended with uncertainty.

I went to Opeglia as a teacher again, knowing all the time that teaching did not suit me. This time I was a master in a middle school. After a period off I went with Cesare Battisti, then chief editor of the *Popolo*. Later he was destined to become one of the greatest of our national heroes—he who gave his life, he who was executed by the enemy Austrians in the War, he who then was giving his thoughts and will to obtaining freedom of the Province of Trento from the rule of Austria. His noble and proud soul are always in my memory. His aspirations as a Socialist patriot called to me.

One day I wrote an article maintaining that the Italian border was not at Ala, the little town which in those days stood on the old frontier between our Kingdom and the old Austria. Whereupon I was expelled from Austria by the Imperial and Royal Government of Vienna.

I was becoming used to expulsion. Once more a wanderer, I went back to Forli.

The itch of journalism was in me. My opportunity was before me in the editorship of a local Socialist newspaper. I understood now that the Gordian knot of Italian political life could only be undone by an act of violence.

Therefore I became the public crier of this basic partisan warlike conception. The time had come to shake the souls of men and fire their minds to thinking and acting. It was not long before I was proclaimed the mouthpiece of the intransigeant revolutionary Socialist faction. I was only twenty-nine years old when at Reggio Emilia, at the Congress in 1912, two years before the World War began, I was nominated as director of the *Avanti*. It was the only daily of the Socialist cause and was published in Milan.

I lost my father just before I left for my new office. He was only fifty-seven. Nearly forty of those years had been spent in politics. His was a rectangular mind, a wise spirit, a generous heart. He had looked into the eyes of the first internationalist agitators and philosophers. He had been in prison for his ideas.

The Romagna—that part of Italy from which we all came—a spirited district with traditions of struggle for freedom against foreign oppressions, knew my father's merit. He wrestled year in and year out with endless difficulties, and he had lost the small family patrimony by helping friends who had gone beyond their depth in the political struggle.

Prestige he had among all those who came into contact with him. The best political men of his day liked him and respected him. He died poor. I believe his foremost desire was to live to see his sons correctly estimated by public opinion.

At the end he understood at last that the old eternal

traditional forces such as capital could not be permanently overthrown by a political revolution. He turned his attention at the end towards bettering the souls of individuals. He wanted to make mankind true of heart and sensitive to fraternity. Many were the speeches and articles about him after his death; three thousand of the men and women he had known followed his body to the grave.

My father's death marked the end of family unity for us—the family.

I plunged forward into big politics when I settled in Milan at the head of the *Avanti*. My brother Arnaldo went on with his technical studies and my sister Edvige, having the offer of an excellent marriage, went off to live with her husband in a little place in Romagna called Premilcuore. Each one of us took up for himself the torn threads of the family. We were separated but in touch. We did not reunite again, however, until August 1914, when we met to discuss politics—and War. War had come. War—that female of dreads and fascinations.

Up till then I had worked hard to build up the circulation, the influence and the prestige of the *Avanti*. After some months the circulation had increased to more than one hundred thousand.

I then had a dominant situation in the Party. But I can say that I did not yield an inch to demagoguery.

I have never flattered the crowd nor wheedled anyone; I spoke always of the costs of victories—sacrifice and sweat and blood.

I was living most modestly with my family, with my wife Rachele, wise and excellent woman who has followed me with patience and devotion across all the wide vicissitudes of my life. My daughter Edda was then the joy of our home. We had nothing to want. I saw myself



in the midst of fierce struggle, but my family did and always has represented to me an oasis of security and refreshing calm.

Those years before the World War were filled by political twists and turns. Italian life was not easy. Difficulties were many for the people. The conquest of Tripolitania had exacted its toll of lives and money in a measure far beyond our expectation. Our lack of political understanding brought at least one riot a week. During one ministry of Giolitti I remember thirty-three. They had their harvest of killed and wounded and of corroding bitterness of heart. Riots and upheavals among day labourers, among the peasants in the Valley of the Po, riots in the South. Even separatist movements in our Islands. And in the meantime, above all this atrophy of normal life, there went on the tournament and joust of political parties struggling for power.

I thought then, as I think now, that only the common denominator of a great sacrifice of blood could have restored to all the Italian nation an equalization of rights and duties. The attempt at revolution—"the red week"—was not revolution as much as it was chaos. No leaders. No means to go on! The middle class and the bourgeoisie gave us another picture of their insipid spirit.

We were in June then, picking over our own affairs with a microscope.

Suddenly the murder of Serajevo came from the blue.

In July—the War.

Up till that event my progress had been somewhat diverse, my growth of capacity somewhat varied. In looking back one has to weigh the effect upon one of various influences commonly supposed powerful.

It is a general conviction that good or bad friends can decisively alter the course of a personality. Perhaps it

may be true for those fundamentally weak in spirit whose rudders are always in the hands of the steersmen. During my life, I believe, neither my school friends, my war friends, nor my political friends ever had the slightest influence upon me. I have listened always with intense interest to their words, their suggestions and sometimes to their advice, but I am sure that whenever I took an extreme decision I have obeyed only the firm commandment of will and conscience which came from within.

I do not believe in the supposed influence of books. I do not believe in the influence which comes from perusing the books about the lives and characters of men.

For myself, I have used only one big book.

For myself, I have had only one great teacher.

The book is life lived.

The teacher is day-by-day experience.

The reality of experience is far more eloquent than all the theories and philosophies on all the tongues and on all the shelves.

I have never, with closed eyes, accepted the thoughts of others when they were estimating events and realities, either in the normal course of things or when the situation appeared exceptional. I have searched, to be sure with a spirit of analysis, the whole ancient and modern history of my Country. I have drawn parallels because I wanted to explore to the depths on the basis of historical fact the profound sources of our national life and of our character, and to compare our capacities with those of other peoples.

For my supreme aim I have had the public interest. If I spoke of life I did not speak of a concept of my own life, my family life or that of my friends. I spoke and thought and conceived of the whole Italian life taken as a synthesis —as an expression of a whole people.

I do not wish to be misunderstood, for I give a definite

value to friendship, but it is more for sentimental reasons than for any logical necessity either in the realm of politics or that of reasoning and logic. I, perhaps more than most men, remember my school friends. I have followed their various careers. I keep in my memory all my War friends. And teachers, and superiors and assistants. It makes little difference whether these friendships were with commanding officers or with typical workers of our soil.

On my soldier friends the life of trench warfare—hard and fascinating—has left, as it has upon me, a profound effect. Great friendships are not perfected on school benches, nor in political assemblies. Only in front of the magnitude and the suggestiveness of danger, only after having lived together in the anxieties and torments of War can one measure the soundness of a friendship or measure in advance how long it is destined to go on.

In politics, Italian life has had a rather short panorama of men. All know each other. I have not forgotten those who in other days were my companions in the Socialistic struggle. Their friendship remains, provided they on their part acknowledge the need to make amends for many errors. and provided they have been able to understand that my political evolution has been the product of a constant expansion, of a flow from springs always nearer to the realities of living life and always further away from the rigid structures of sociological theorists.

My Fascisti friends live always in my thought. I believe the younger ones have special place there. The organization of Fascismo was marked and stamped with Youth. It has youth's spirit and it gathered youth, which like a young orchard has many years of productiveness for the future.

Though it appears that the obligations of governing increase around me every day, I never forget those who were

with me, the generous and wise builders, the unselfish and faithful collaborators, the devoted soldiers of a new Fascist Italy. I follow step by step their personal and public fortunes.

Some minds appear curious as to what territories my reading has explored. I have never attached my name or my mind to a certain school, and, as I have already said, I never believed that books were absolute and sure viaticums of life.

I have read the Italian authors, old and new, thinkers, politicians, artists. I have always been attracted by the study of our Renaissance in its various aspects. The 19th century with its artistic and spiritual contrasts, classicism and romanticism and their contrasts have held my attention. I have studied thoroughly the period of our history called Risorgimento in its moral and political essence.

I have analysed with great care all the development of our intellectual life from 1870 up to this moment.

These studies have occupied the most serene hours of my day.

Among foreign writers, I have meditated much upon the work of the German thinkers. I have admired the French. One of the books that interested me most was *The Psychology of the Crowd*, by Gustave Lebon. The intellectual life of the Anglo-Saxons interests me especially, because of the organized character of its culture and its scholastic taste and flavour.

But all that I have read and am reading is only a picture that is unfolded before my eyes without giving me an impression strong enough to make an incision in me. I draw out only the cardinal points that give me, above all and first of all, the necessary elements for the comparison of the essence of the different nations.

I am desperately Italian. I believe in the function of Latinity.

I came to these conclusions after and through a critical study of the German, Anglo-Saxon and Slavonic history and that of the world; nor have I for obvious reasons neglected the history of the other continents.

The American people by their sure and active creative lines of life have touched, and touch, my sensibility. For I am a man of Government and of Party. I endlessly admire those who make out of creative work a law of life, those who win with the ability of their genius and not with the intrigue of their eloquence. I am for those who seek to make technique perfect in order to dominate elements and give to men more sure footings for the future.

I do not respect, I even hate, those men that leech a tenth of the riches produced by others.

The American nation is a creative nation sane with straight-lined ideas. When I talk with men of the United States it does not occur to me to use diplomacy for winning or persuading them. The American spirit is crystalline. One has to know how to take her and possibly win her over with a watchful responsiveness rather than with cunning words. As the reserves of wealth are gone now from the Continents to North America, it is right that a large part of the attention of the world should be concentrated upon the activity of this nation, that has men of great value, economists of real wisdom, and scholars that are outlining the basis of a new science and a new culture. I admire the discipline of the American people and their sense of organization. Certainly every nation has its periods. The United States are now in the golden age. It is necessary to study these tendencies and their results, and this is not only in the interest of America, but in the interest of the world.

America, a land harbouring so many of our emigrants, still calls to the spirit of new Youth.

I look to her youth for her destinies and the preservation of her growing ideals, just as I look to the youth of Italy for the progress of the Fascist State.

It is not easy to remember always the importance of youth.

It is not easy to retain the spirit of youth.

It was fortunate for me that in the trenches of the Carso—one of the bloodiest and most terrible spots of all the allied battle-fronts, and in the vicissitudes of difficult experiences in the struggle with life—I did not leave my own youth behind.

## CHAPTER II

### WAR AND ITS EFFECT UPON A MAN

I WRITE of War and my experience in and with War. I write of popular misconceptions as to War. I write of my convictions as to War. And, I write of War from two points of view—the politics of the world and the reality of the trenches where I have been and have learned the torture of pain.

It is impossible for me to show my development and feelings from War without showing how my nation entered War, felt War and accepted War. My psychology was the Italian psychology. I lived it and I cannot suppress it.

It was nonsense to believe that War came unheralded and as a new experience.

The European War which suddenly burst out in 1914, during a period of apparent economical and moral peacefulness, was not a sudden return to barbarism as many optimistic Socialists and believers in democracy wished, and still to this day wish, people to believe. One must not forget that in 1905 Russia fought with Japan a long disastrous and exhausting War. In 1911 there was the Libian War. In 1912 and 1913 two Balkan Wars had kept the awakened attention of Europe on the destinies of these nations; these Wars had in them the characteristics of an extraordinary drama, as in the incident of Lule-Burgas and in the siege of Adrianople.

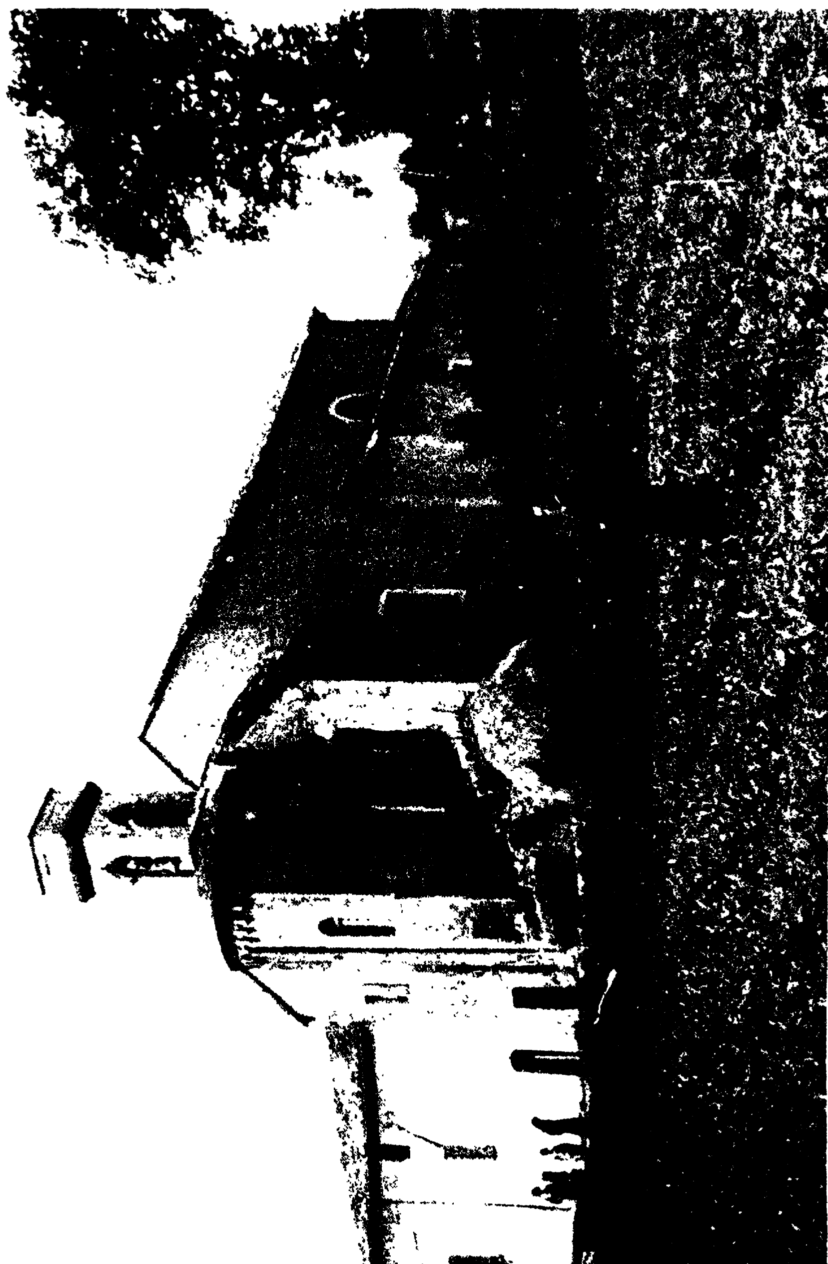
The real truth of the matter was that an intense spirit of War was all over Europe. In the air, and everybody breathed, it was the imponderable; we were on the dawn

of a new tragic period of the history of mankind. The beginning of that hard historic event, the World War, was at hand. The gigantic development drew peoples and continents. It compelled tens of millions of men to live in the trenches, to fight inch by inch for many years over the bloody theatre of tragic conflict. Millions of dead and wounded, victories and defeats, complex interests, moral or immoral, spirit of resentment and hate, bonds of friendship and disillusions—all that chaotic and passionate world which lived and made the great War, was part of a cyclopic ensemble which is difficult to grasp, to define, to circumscribe in mere autobiographic memoirs like these.

When one thinks that Germany alone has already published on the War sixty official books and considers many that the other nations have or will publish, one may lose himself in the labyrinth of speculative thoughts. This tremendous chaos gave birth among the defeated nations to the dissolving intellectual scepticism from which sprang the philosophy of realities.

Therefore I proceed by impression, by remembrances. I force my memory to build up, in a logical line running parallel to my thoughts and actions, the rich picture and the innumerable interlocking events which took place in the most tortured period that humanity ever knew. I was intimately entwined with it.

The tragedy of Serajevo, the murder of the Archduke Francis Ferdinand, heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary, and his wife, created a panic in the public opinion of the whole of Europe. Remember that I was then editor of an internationalist Socialist daily. That which wounded the sensitiveness of the various nations was the lightning rapidity of the tragedy. I could see the mathematical efficiency of the organizations which made possible the plans and success of the murder in spite of all the exceptional



precautions taken by the Austria-Hungary police. I realized that Europe was in sympathy with the restlessness of Serbia against the old Hapsburg monarchy; after the annexation of Bosnia-Erzegovnia by Austria that region never had a minute's peace. The Serbian mentality which did, and still does, work itself along the subterranean tunnels of secret societies, gave from time to time unpleasant surprises to Austria-Hungary and the large empire was suffering from it. But no more than a thoroughbred is disturbed by flies.

The tragedy of Serajevo, however, appeared to me to be the last straw. Everyone understood that Austria would act. Strong measures! All the Embassies, all the different political parties of Europe, realized the gravity of the case and its terrible consequences. They went feverishly to work to find a possible solution. And we looked on!

In Italy the echo of the murder of Serajevo aroused only curiosity and a thirst for more news. Even when the corpses of the Archduke and his wife were taken into the Gulf of Trieste, which was lighted up the whole night with tremendous torches, the impression of Italians, even those still under Austrian rule, was no deeper than it would have been in the presence of a spectacular epilogue of a theatrical tragedy.

Francis Ferdinand was an enemy of Italy. I thought that he always underestimated our race. He was not able to sense the heart-throbs of the people of Italian blood still under his flag. He could not weigh the power of race consciousness. He was cherishing the dream of a monarchy melting three races together. Races I know are difficult to melt. Francis Ferdinand enjoyed the display of his antipathy toward Italy. He took interest in the affairs of Italy only to seek a possible solution of the temporal power of the Pope. It was said that in the secrecy of his

Court and of his religious advisers he contemplated the creation of a Papal city in Rome with an outlet on the sea!

Though deeply a Catholic, like myself, he accepted of Christianity only the hard familiar autocratic ideals which were the base of the old despotism forming the platform of autocratic government, but incapable of speaking to souls.

In the psychological make-up of small, snarling Archduke he believed himself to be specially anointed by God to rule over subjects. He put fear in the hearts of smaller nations bordering his domain. His death gave surprise; it gave no sadness to us. For obvious reasons the pathetic end of the Grand Duchess created feelings of a more sympathetic nature. We Italians are responsive—sympathetic.

The telegram of the Kaiser to the bereaved children fed the already dramatic tune and time of our impressions. I saw that Germany intended to steadfastly stand back of Austria for whatever action this nation was going to take toward Serbia. It was thought that Vienna would make a formal protest to Belgrade, but no one anticipated an ultimatum of such deadliness as to fatally wound the sensibility and the honour, as well as the very freedom, of that nation. All these currents I had to watch as the young editor of the *Avanti*.

The dictatorial form of the ultimatum, the style in which it was written, brought home to the world the shocking realization that War hung in the sky. We, in Italy, had to ask whether internationalism was having a success or whether it was an unreality. I wondered and reached a conclusion.

Embassies went feverishly to work; the political parties added the pressure of their weight to the diplomatic activities. The call to arms and the clamour of gathering

armies put into second line the theoretical protests of socialist and international forces.

All of us in Italy who faced hard facts rather than mouthy theories heard the call of our country—a call of loneliness. Illusions burst like bubbles. Even the Convention of French and German Socialists, and the murder of Jaurès in Paris were but secondary episodes. To me they appeared as fringes of the mighty and dramatic conflict toward which day by day the various nations were drawn by destiny.

I must not forget that a few months previous to the Great War I had heard and noted a voice raised in the French Parliament painting with pessimistic colours the inefficiency of the French army, both from the viewpoint of economic War as well as the lack of modern means of defence and offence. Clemenceau, foaming at the mouth, was present at this discussion. He said afterward that never in his career as a politician since 1871 had he witnessed a more dramatic scene than this one, in which the French nation was compelled to fully realize the insufficiency of its army, lacking the very means needed for a great conflict. That was a lesson. We do not forget it.

War was ripe. The tardy and weak intervention both known and secret of the Pope and of the benevolent nations outside the circle of the Allies had no weight. They could not stop the procession of events. War began the first of August, 1914. It was full bloom of summer. Under the deep shadow of the cloud the people of old Europe stood in awe, but fascinated as one is fascinated by a snake.

Italy a few years previously had renewed the Triple Alliance Treaty. It had been a marriage without respect and without trust brought about more in order to counterbalance military power than by political necessity. There is small difference between security and military alliance.

The Alliance with Austria and Germany gave, however, to Italy a certain latitude and a certain freedom of movement. The Marchese of San Giuliano, who was at the head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, faced by the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia and by the scheming to bring about War at all costs, had to play fast to keep Italy neutral. As a matter of fact the Treaty called only for action if one or more of the Nations of the Triple Alliance was assaulted by a nation outside that Alliance. We were kept in the dark as I well knew. That was enough to break the pact—to free us from further obligations to that Alliance.

One of the first courageous actions in which Italy showed the measure of her independence and strength was recognition of this. Meanwhile the intervention of Russia in behalf of Serbia called also France against Germany, the ally of Austria-Hungary.

I watched England; she was pondering deeply upon the step to take, and then, in order to keep her supremacy, and also for the sake of her pride and the sake of humanity, she moved her formidable war machinery and quickened the organization of new armies to snatch from Germany's grip the control of the old Continent.

Public opinion in Italy was deeply moved facing War with its German invasion of East France. There was the description with horrid details of German methods, and above all, the invasion of Belgium in spite of every sense of right and humanity. The French army was helplessly forced back. The future, not of one nation but of many nations, was on the scale. Of this, in my editorial office, I was always conscious. There was also the feeling of a common culture which was compelling us to forget past and present quarrels. I could not bear the idea that my Country might abandon those who were crushed under the weight of War and unwarranted misfortune.

Germany began to influence Italian public opinion with methods of propaganda that irritated the sensitiveness of our race. That enraged me. To direct this propaganda a great diplomat, Prince Von Bulow, who knew the Italian and Roman world intimately, was sent. His aim in Italy was to assure its neutrality for good and all.

But our Nation was turning toward War. I was helping. The Socialist Party which at that time had a certain weight in Italian life, due more to the weakness of other political parties than to its own strength, was uncertain what attitude to take. There it wobbled. The majority in that Party stood for an absolute neutrality; a neutrality without limit of time, pledge or dignity. Among that Party there were many who stood openly in sympathy with Germany. I did not.

A handful of intelligent and strong-willed men began to ask themselves if it was really right for Italians to lend themselves to the political aims of the King of Prussia, and if that was good for the future of Italy and of the world. I, myself, asked that question in the newspaper *Avanti*. For obvious reasons it was read avidly by every class of citizens. The putting of that question was my most distinguished effort at journalism.

It was sufficient to put that question to cause a part of public opinion to turn toward the possibility of our standing side by side with France and England in the War! We could not, and should not, forget that there were certain sentimental reasons beside the practical reasons advising us to review in this general conflict the old decision concerning our Eastern border which had remained open since our War with Austria in 1886.

I walked home to my family, to my home, at night with pregnant questions in my mind, with deepening determinations, with hardening resolutions. Above all there was my

own Country. I saw that Internationalism was crumbling. The unit of loyalty was too large. I wrote an editorial in which I said also how utterly foolish was the idea that, even if a Socialist State were created, the old barriers of race and historical contentions would not go on causing wars.

Italy's borders on the eastern side reach the Judrio, but the region of Trentino illegally held by Austria entered as a wedge between Lombardy and the Venetian provinces. Our deal with the empire of Austria-Hungary was still to be closed, because the borders prophesied by Dante were dear to every Italian heart. They were still and always would be along the line of the Brennero and of the Giulian and Illyrac Alps, including Fiume and Dalmatia.

Facing this new situation every political man, including myself, began to examine his conscience. The mere mention of this problem was sufficient to make clear and evident the hidden travail of national consciousness. I was transformed in my thought.

"Now or never," was the war-cry of Cesare Battisti, whose noble spirit and final martyrdom by Austrian execution has made him immortal in Italian hearts. Then there was the prophetic vision of that fiery revolutionary spirit, Filippo Corridoni. With their inspiration I began to drag with me a fraction of the Socialists in favour of War. I had with me rebels of many schools, who through the dregs of their struggles would in the end now stand once more upon the indestructible vitality of our race.

The Socialist Senedrium, seeing where I was going, took the *Avanti* out of my control; I could no longer preach by that means intervention of Italy in the War. I faced the Socialists in our Conventions. I was expelled. I held public gatherings.

I created the Fascisti—a group of daring youth who believed that intervention could be forced. Do not doubt

that their actions shook deeply our political framework existing from the time of the independence of Italy up till 1914. I was their leader.

It is interesting to-day when democracy is challenged to recall that the liberal democratic pacifist group, headed by Giovanni Giolitti, a man of great influence in Parliament, and also a shrewd organizer of political schemes, was busy in the attempt to find a formula which would solve the problem of righting the borders of Italy, but which would save our Country from the burden, the sacrifice, and the loss of life that every War imposes. Giolitti promised that even without War Italy could obtain a " great deal." This " great deal " awakened a feeling of sarcasm in the generous hearts of Italians. Naturally they are realists and the enemies of all forms of political bargaining.

Italians were looking beyond those peaceful concessions and those petty betterings of the borders. They did not believe in the sincerity of this scheming. I considered it weak statesmanship—the statesmanship of compromise. There were seers who saw in the European conflict not only national advantages, but the possibility of a supremacy of Race. In the cycle of time again a dramatic period had come which was making it possible for Italy by the weight of its army to deal as an equal with the leading nations of the world.

That was our chance. I wanted to seize it. It became my one thought of intensity.

The World War began on July 28th, 1914. Within sixty days I severed my official connection with the Socialist Party. I had already ceased to be editor of the *Avanti*.

I felt lighter, fresher. I was free! I was better prepared to fight my battles than when I was bound by the dogmas of any political organization. But I understood that I could not use with efficient strength my convictions if I was

without that modern weapon, capable of all possibilities, ready to arm and to help, good for offence and defence—the newspaper.

I needed a daily paper. I hungered for one. I gathered together a few of my political friends who had followed me in the last hard struggle and we held a "War Council." When money alone is concerned I am anything but a wizard. When it is a question of means or of capital to start a project, or how to finance a newspaper, I grasp only the abstract side, the political value, and the spiritual essence of the thing. To me money is detestable; what it may do is sometimes beautiful and sometimes noble.

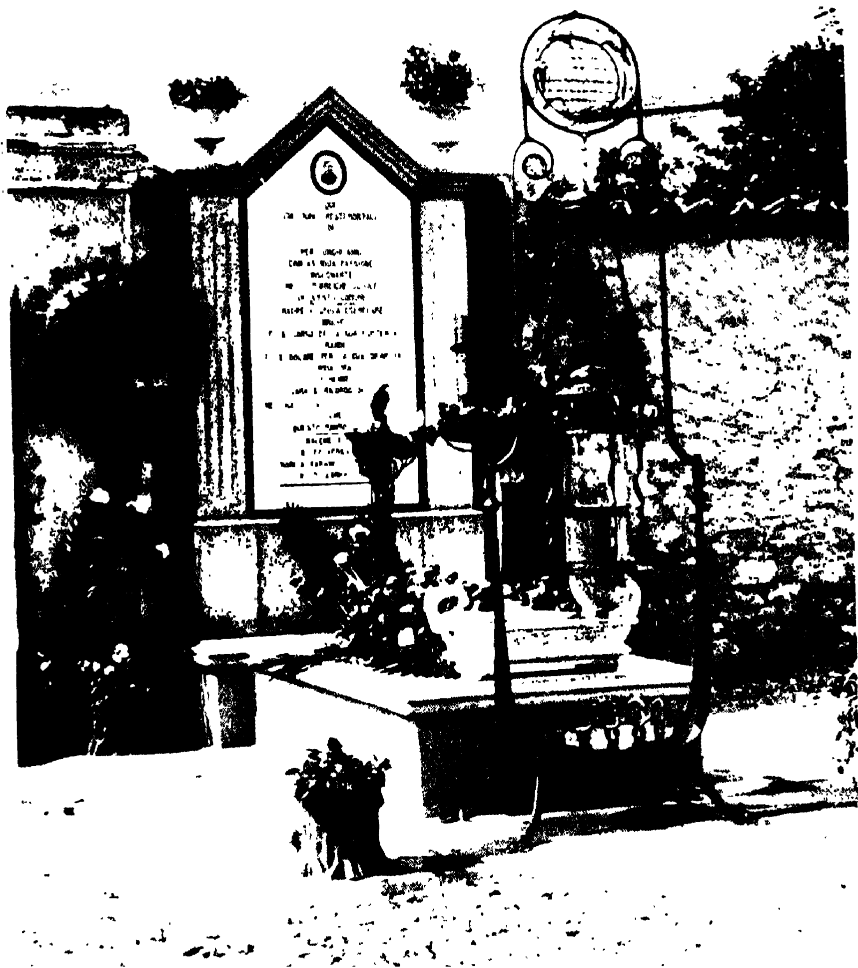
A few friends, bristling with ideas and ardent with faith, found almost immediately small rooms, garret-like, in the narrow street of Paolo da Cannobio, near Piazza del Duomo in Milan. Near by there was a printing establishment. Its owner agreed to publish our newspaper at a small cost. I was mad to tell Italy and Italians the truth—their opportunity!

We had no need for great means. We wanted a newspaper that would hold the city of Milan like a fortress with editorial articles of such value as would be reprinted, or quoted, by every Italian newspaper.

Thus—and how dramatically!—the number of our readers would be multiplied. That was my passion. Our offices were quickly furnished with a desk and a few chairs. I can never cease to have affection for that intellectual dug-out, the journalistic trenches from which I began to fight.

A contract was signed with the printing establishment; a contract that every week was in danger of smashing for the lack of the few thousand lira needed to pay our weekly expenses. But we were living on an idea.

On November 15th, 1914, the first number of the *Popolo*



BURIAL PLACE OF MUSSOLINI'S MO

*d' Italia* appeared. Even now I call this new paper my most cherished child; it was only through it, small as was its beginning, that I was able to win all the battles of my political life. I am still its director.

I could write and I may write a thousand memories of this newspaper which was born in 1914 and remained my platform up to 1922. It was an instrument for the making of me. The name of the *Popolo d' Italia* will reoccur again and again. Its story in any case may be told through my personality as a political man, as a newspaper man, as a believer in this War, as a soldier, as an Italian—and as a Fascista.

My first article in the *Popolo d' Italia* turned a large part of public opinion toward the intervention of Italy in the War, side by side with France and England.

Standing by me and helping my work as newspapermen were the Fascisti. They were composed of revolutionary spirits who believed in intervention. They were youths—the students of the Universities, the Socialist syndicalists, destroying faith in Karl Marx, by their ideals. There were professional men, too, and the working men who could still hear the real voice of the Country!

And now while Italy remained out of the War our first legions of volunteers were organized and went to France to fight. In the Argonne fell the two sons of Ricciotti Garibaldi, Bruno and Costante, nephews of the Great Garibaldi who conquered for United Italy North Sicily and Naples. The funeral of the two heroes took place in Rome and had solemn echoes all over Italy. Again the red shirt, once distinguished as the saviours of Italy, now in the land of France testified to the indestructibility of Latinity.

The past quarrels—not long past—of Mediterranean interests were wiped out. The hostilities of the French during the time of our War in Libya were put aside. No

one remembered the episodes of the French ships *Manouba* and *Carthage* which brought help to the Turks, who were fighting against us, in January 1912. Everything was off. France was in danger! Assaulted and invaded after the tragic rape of Belgium. This I preached and set forth. France was in danger.

Gabriel D'Annunzio on the 5th of May made his speech at Quarto dei Mille, near Genoa. Quarto dei Mille was the starting-point of Garibaldi and his thousand Northerners who went down to Sicily to deliver Southern Italy from the yoke of the Bourbons. He with superb eloquence exhorted Italy to enter the War.

The spirit of the Country was tuned up. The opposition of Giolitti brought about a quick decision. The Crown, bound by Parliamentary formulas and by the advice of its councillors, wanted to follow strictly the literal and orthodox interpretation of the Constitution, and told the personal representative of the Kaiser that Italy as an old ally had been kept in the dark and thus betrayed.

The insurrection of Milan in favour of War, the strong feelings of the same flavour in Rome, Padua, Genoa and Naples decided His Majesty Victor Emmanuel the Third to ask Giovanni Giolitti, then Prime Minister, to resign, and then he called Salandra to organize a new Ministry. I felt that I had had a part in winning this battle. Still a young, unproved man I had already a record of untrammelled freedom and power.

The new Ministry spelled War. Thrown aside was the "great deal" of His Excellency Giolitti; the question now was to choose the right moment and the right way to jump into the War. We were breathing hard, our hearts were ready, we were awaiting the great hour. It came May 24th, 1915! Can anyone say what were my emotions at this moment of triumph?

I cannot try to narrate in one chapter all the events of the War on the Italian front. It is impossible. The War moulded me; I was forced into its dramatic unfolding in the circumscribed viewpoint of a mere soldier of the War. I will tell what touched me most as a soldier and indirectly as a political man.

I made up my mind to be the best soldier possible from the very day that I wore again the glorious grey-green uniform of the regiment of Bersaglieri—the best shock troops of Italy, in which regiment I had already served during the time of my compulsory military service. I wanted to be a soldier, obedient, faithful to discipline, stretching myself with all my might to the fulfilment of my duty.

In this I feel that I succeeded. My political position brought me plenty of offers of privileges and sheltered places! I turned them down.

I wanted to create the impression of a complete and rigid consistence with an ideal. This was not a scheming on my part for personal gain; it was a deep need in my nature of what I believed, and I still hold on to—as my life's dedication—namely, that once a man sets up to be the expounder of an ideal or of a new school of thought he must consistently and intensively live daily life and fight battles for the doctrines that he teaches—at any cost until victory—to the end!

Time has effaced many things; the easy spirit of forgetfulness has erased so much! Victory, which came after forty-one months of hard fighting, has awakened many deep resentments.

As soon as War was declared, as I have said, I asked the military authorities to accept my services as a volunteer. They answered that I could not be a volunteer. That was a tragedy. They said that they refused on the ground

that an article of the military by-laws considered as possible volunteers only those who had been rejected for physical unfitness, or were exonerated for other reasons from compulsory military service. I could not be accepted as a volunteer. I was to wait my turn to be called to arms until the order from my superiors would be sent me. I was disconsolate.

Happily my turn came quickly. On September 1st, only three months after Italy declared War, I donned the simple uniform of a private Bersaglieri. I was sent to Brescia, in Lombardy, not far from the raids of aeroplanes, to drill.

Almost at once I was, to my great relief, dispatched to the thick of the fighting on the high Alps. For a few months I underwent the hardest trials of my life in mountain trenches. We still had nothing to soften our hardships, in the trenches nor in the barracks. We were simply stumbling along. Short of everything—carrying on—muddling through. What we suffered the first months—cold, rain, mud, hunger! They did not succeed in dampening in the slightest degree my enthusiasm and my conviction as to the necessity and the inevitableness of War. They did not change the direction of one hair of my head, one thought in it.

I was chosen to be amanuensis of Headquarters. That I refused. I refused flatly. I amused myself instead by joining the most dangerous expeditions of reconnoitre. It was my will and my wish. I gained through that. Within a few months I was promoted corporal by merit of War action with a citation from my superior in these words, "Benito Mussolini, ever the first in operations of courage and audacity."

My political past, with the suspicions of cautions and sometimes unseeing authorities, still followed me; it was

enough to keep my superiors from sending me to the Training School for officers of Vernezzo. After one week of leave I went back to the trenches, where I remained for months. The same life, feverish, adventurous, desperate—and then typhoid fever sent me to the military hospital at Cividale. When I was better I was packed off to Ferrara for a brief stupid period of convalescence. From these I again took my place on the high pinnacles of the Alps, where at night one looking into the dark sky with its shimmering stars felt nearer to the great dome above.

My battalion was ordered to an advance post on the Carso (Section 144) to take up the offence. I was then made one of the company of soldiers who had specialized in hand-grenades. We lived only a few dozen yards from the enemy in a perpetual and sometimes, it seemed, an eternal atmosphere of shell fire and mortal danger that would be our life for ever.

After the first period of hardship I became perfectly and almost comfortably accustomed to all the terrible elements that life in the trenches involves. I read with hungry eagerness the *Popolo d' Italia*—my newspaper. I had left it in the hands of a few friends. Precipitously separated from it as one leaves suddenly a beloved relative, I had given orders to keep alight the lamp of Italy's duty and destiny. I commanded: "Continue always to call for War to the end." I wrote often to my friends. Never did I let myself indulge in writing all my true feelings and opinions, because I was first of all a soldier—obeying. I found my recreation in the trenches studying the psychology of officers and troops. Later on that practice in observation became invaluable to me.

In my rough heart I held a persistent admiration for the soldiers from all corners of Italy. Many ordered to the Eastern Front were not convinced of the historical basis for

the War; yet they knew how to obey their commanding officers with admirable discipline. Many of those officers were students of the colleges and universities. It was fine to see them striving to emulate the "regulars" and to prove that the old-time valour was still alive in the new Italian generation.

The fact was that War with its heavy toll of man and materials and with its terrific hardships surprised us. It was far away from our Garibaldian conception of what War was. We were compelled, in break-neck haste, to modify our ideas, to change our systems of fighting and our methods of offence and defence. My heart was gladdened to see that the capacity of adaptability of our race brought marvellous and quick returns. The Headquarters and all the auxiliary military organisations, particularly the medical, worked with a precision which I never have forgotten. But often, as I went over the political situation back of our armies, dark doubts were in my mind. The work and actions of the men in power and of the political organizations centred in Rome caused me deep fears. The parliamentary world seemed unable to free itself from its old faults.

The poisonous currents of non-intervention and neutrality were still spending their last strength upon us. They would not fairly face their defeat. I knew they were doing their utmost to minimize the energy and elasticity of our fighting efforts.

The foolish babblings and fears of the coffee-house strategists, the slackers whose presence offended the families whose sons were in the War, contributed to depress the spirit of resistance. As a plain soldier I could not understand how, for instance, Rumania could be dragged into the War with a few hundred machine guns. How could Greece be persuaded to march against the Turks influenced

by a classic dance that Isadora Duncan performed at the Pirea?

I was following day by day the movement of our army; the battle of Isonzo in 1916; the fights on the Alps. With less interest I followed the fortunes of War in France, the unfortunate failure at the Dardanelles and the developments in the Eastern section. As for Italy, never for a minute did I doubt that victory would finally come to us. Though War were to last longer than the longest estimate, though our economic power was tottering under the effort and weight of the conflict, nevertheless I was sure of a final victory.

The Italian army in its various actions was led with a method of successive assaults to shake the efficiency of the enemy. In spite of all the hardship, discipline remained intact throughout our lines. The invasion attempted on the plateaux of the Alps in 1916 was soon thrown back. The soldiers of the Carso where I was had all the appearance of seasoned veterans.

In such a gigantic drama when thousands of our brothers fell it is absurd to speak of oneself.

However, to prove once more what miseries were woven into the Italian life of politics, I was compelled from time to time to give out in the newspapers news concerning myself. This was in order to smash the suspicions of those persons who thought me hidden in some office distributing mail, and entertaining in my mind doubts on the possibility of our winning the War. I was compelled to offset this slander and to state over and over what I had done and what I was doing. I was then major-corporal of the Bersaglieri and had been in the front-line trenches from the beginning of the War up to February 1917, always under arms, always facing the enemy without my faith being shaken, or my convictions wavering an inch. From

time to time I sent articles to the *Popolo d' Italia* exhorting to endless resistance. I pleaded for unshaken faith in final victory. For reasons of military discipline I used a *nom de plume.* Thus I found myself fighting in two ways—against the enemy without and in front of me, and against the enemy of weak spirit within and behind me.

One morning, on the 22nd of February, 1917, during a bombardment on the enemy trenches at Sector 144—the sector under the heaviest shell fire of the hard-pressed Carso—there happened one of those incidents which was a daily occurence in trench life. One of our own grenades burst in our trench. There were about twenty of us soldiers. We were covered with dirt, smoke, and torn by metal. Four died. Various others were fatally wounded.

I was rushed to the hospital of Ronchi a few miles from the enemy trench. Doctor Piccagnoni and other surgeons took care of me with the greatest zeal. My wounds were serious. The patience and the ability of the physicians succeeded in taking out of my body forty-four pieces of the grenade. Flesh was torn; bones broken. I faced atrocious pain; my suffering was indescribable. I underwent practically all my operations without the aid of an anæsthetic. I had twenty-seven operations in one month, all except two were without anæsthetics.

This infernal life of pain lasted until a furious bombardment burst into pieces one wing and part of the central building of my hospital at Ronchi. All the wounded were rushed to a far-away refuge, but my condition would not permit my removal. Unable to move, I remained for days under the intermittent fire of the enemy guns along the dirty jagged ruins of the building. I was absolutely defenceless.

In spite of all, my wounds began to heal. Better days and relief came. I received numberless telegrams of



solicitations, and once His Majesty the King called. His warm sense of humanity toward all soldiers and toward the victims of the War will never be forgotten by me or by Italy.

After some months I found myself in a war hospital in Milan. In August I began to walk with crutches, on which I swung about for many months. My limbs were too weak to support my weight.

I took my place as a fighter in my newspaper office. The acute situation created by the incredible and inconceivable failure of the Russian front was putting upon us new duties. It was necessary to face them. To all this there was added a subtle propaganda in the land. That despicable poison had as a slogan the vile sentence of a Socialist member of Parliament, "We will desert the trenches before the winter comes."

There was need to fight to a finish these mysterious forces which were playing upon the sentiments and sufferings of the people. Soldiers after a fortnight's furlough were returning to the trenches in a sullen frame of mind. Life in the cities had all the characteristics of revelry. It was the psychological moment in which it was necessary to have the people feel highly the strength of authority. It was necessary that the Government should stand up in its shoes.

I do not choose to make posthumous recriminations. The weakness of internal politics in 1917, the feeble parliamentary situation, the hateful Socialistic propaganda, were certainly preparing the ground for events that could prove to be ruinous. And the blow came in October 1917; it took the name of Caporetto.

Never in my life as an Italian and as a politician have I experienced a sorrow equal to that which I suffered after news of the defeat of Caporetto.

This episode, compared with other defeats on the various theatres of the Great War, certainly did not have an exceptional importance, but it was a terrific blow for Italians. This sudden breaking down of our front let a wedge of the enemy army penetrate into the high valley of the Isonzo! We in the first rush of the War had gone over the borders into old Austria, carrying our warfare on to enemy ground. We had withstood in 1916 the attack on the Alps of Asiago. We had conquered the plateau of Bainsizza. We had been ten times victorious on the Isonzo. Our sensitiveness, our tormented souls were now shaken to the depths.

The moment was fearful. The Third Army surrounded on the other side of Isonzo must be saved! It was impellent to stand at all costs on the Piave and to resist like stone on Mount Grappa to save the north of the Venetian provinces from being cut off from the rest of Italy! The rally of the Army, followed by quick action, took place in almost no time. On Mount Grappa the Army of Iron withstood. On the Piave the enemy could not pass by. A new strength entered into play. One could feel it coming. A new spirit of War took its unfaltering stand. Once more we saw the enemy face to face, after losing Gorizia and two provinces, that of Balluno and Udine. We were deeply wounded, and we lived dramatic moments which seared my heart. But we may now be sure that Italy did not go through the tragic hours that many armies and other countries underwent. Compare with our disaster the general picture of the Great War, the loss of three provinces with the battle of the Masure Lakes, the invasion of Koenisberg, the fourteen invaded departments of France, and the flooding of Belgium.

I am proud that during that year of desperate moments my paper gave a higher note to the political life of

the Country. We raised the fighting spirit of the soldiers.

Helped by the mutilated, the wounded, and the pro-War veterans, I began an active campaign of "Stand to a finish." With a fiery style I demanded on the part of the Central Government severe action against slackers and whosoever undermined the spirit of War. I called for the organization of a volunteer army. I asked for military rule in the North of Italy. I insisted on the suppression of Socialist newspapers. I asked for a more human treatment of the soldiers. I campaigned for War-discipline—first behind us and all over the land, then at the Front! This campaign developed by degrees in the newspaper, then in public meetings, in gatherings at the Front. It brought results far beyond my highest hopes. The Government seemed to be tugged after us by our efforts, toward resistance and victory.

Thus the winter went by. With the coming of spring the whole Italian people stretched out their energies toward the front on the Piave and that on the Grappa.

At last! A spirit of national solidarity—deep and alive—had become the common property both of the soldiers and of their families! A high spirit of duty and sacrifice was the rule of life in our Italy!

We were ready in 1918 on the Piave with an heroic army. The Arditi, the first shock troops composed of volunteers who went over the top with hand-grenades and daggers, was giving a unique dramatic appeal to our aggressive spirit. In everyone there was the deep desire to efface the memory of the days of Caporetto. We were to go back—back where our brothers dead and alive were waiting for us! The remembrance of our dead, above all, was calling to us. Surely the wish of our adversaries

to cross the Piave could never be; it was an idle hope to be met and crushed by our own offensive.

Aviation continued to give service of reconnoitring and bombardment. I could feel the Soul of Italy stretching toward victory. Necessity had sharpened the more brilliant minds. June came and with it the dawn of the enemies' attack.

Our secret service succeeded in knowing exactly the time that the enemy would start his drive. Following sound War strategy, our supreme command decided to surprise the enemy, and just a few hours before the enemy was ready to move a deluge of every description fell on the enemy's front lines as well as the supporting lines behind. The enemy's plans were smashed. He threw bridges across the Piave, but every one was destroyed. The Sul Montello, which was once the key of that front and which the enemy intended to take and use as a pincher against our army, we held with dogged tenacity. There were oscillations for a few miles, but the battle raged on without a stop. Our counter-attacks came back always again and again and again. Thus after the first three days the enemy felt that this time the Italians were like an unbreakable wall which they could not scale nor batter down!

Near Zenzon the adversary succeeded in crossing the river as far as Monastie of Treviso, but a rapid counter-attack of a few of our brigades threw him back on the Piave again! It turned into a disaster for the enemy as the river, flooded, washed away bridges and soldiers toward the sea. On the 23rd of June, after five days from the beginning of the big battle, our supreme command assured Italy that our resistance was bound to hold. I felt that it was a sure sign that victory was at hand. I believe to this day that the battle of the Piave was one of the most decisive of the whole World War.

The enemy suffered loss beyond reckoning! About 100,000 Hungarians were sacrificed on the Piave. That brought about deep resentment in Budapest. Among the people of the various races in the Austrian Empire there began to be discussions about the burdens that each nationality in that Empire had to suffer. For them—the enemies—each nationality felt that its treatment was becoming intolerable.

News leaked out to us from Austria-Hungary. It was clear that internal difficulties there were growing every moment. The enemy's army, however, was still holding together, and under the goad of necessity was sharpening the work of oppression on our two provinces which still remained under the weight of occupation and misfortune.

It was at this time, right after the spirit of exhilaration of Victory, that I observed strange tendencies in the Italian political world. Evil activity was at hand. It needed to be exposed and suppressed. It was cloaked under the appearance of humanitarianism. It was planning to give a series of national rights to peoples who never had the consciousness and the dignity of nations—to peoples who had been for more than a century instruments of oppressing the Italian elements under Austria, under the instigation of the despotic Empire. The sun of our Victory was rising, but to be a complete Victory, a victory that would carry our soldiers on the roads to Vienna, it must not falter through false sentimentality.

This crisis was sufficient to "inspire" many "great men" still under the influence of antiquated and rusted democratic ideas to start discussions about the problems of racial differences. They always tended to favour our worst enemies. The spirit of our nationalism was attacked and dwarfed by sophisticated and pernicious applications of sentiment, irritating to our deepest feelings and to our

most legitimate susceptibilities. Voices of the Italians began to say that every time Italy was on the verge of living its hour of joy, glory and victory, there were always those who soiled the moment, and this often not in good faith.

Summer went by, and in October 1918 our supreme command with fifty-one Italian divisions—to which were added three British, two French divisions, one American regiment and a few Czecho-slovakia volunteers—determined to make a decisive and final drive on the Austrian front.

The strategic plan was a very wise one. The enemy's front was pierced at Sernaglia; our army rushed through the break. We started a surrounding movement, one to the left toward Trento, and one to the right toward Udine and the lower Piave. The ardent dash of our soldiers and the ability of our officers brought these movements to full success and crumbled to pieces the whole front of the enemy. The War Bulletin states the enormous number of prisoners, guns and war material that fell into our hands.

The Army of Austria-Hungary was defeated! Its navy had tremendous losses. We landed at Trieste. We occupied Trento!

The final victory was not only a victory of a War. I saw more than that. It was a victory for the whole Italian race. After a thousand years we, awakened, were again giving a tangible proof of our moral and spiritual valour. We were living again on warlike tradition. Our love of Country had bloomed again! We felt our formidable weight in the future of a new Europe. New generations of Italians rejoiced, for the Italian cities were once again rejoined to the Country! Trento and Trieste, as our race had wished so long, now were within the borders—the natural borders

which Dante had prophesied and defined in the 14th century.

In every corner of the Land the church bells rang saluting the new day.

War, so long and so taxing, had ended!

It ended with a full undeniable victory for Italy in spite of the bankruptcy of Russia, and of the abominable work of slackers and professional destroyers of ideals. For me every family wore the badge of a dear one dead or wounded. Widows and orphans of War were proud to show the symbols of sadness and—glory! We were in Trento and Trieste. Fiume was half-conquered, while Dalmatia was still on the scale.

Over Italy reigned almost supreme a spirit of pride and of serenity typical of those who have won. War had lasted longer than we thought, had diminished our wealth, had supposedly reduced to the minimum our future.

Victory, however, warmed our hearts and our souls. It exalted Italians and spurred them to higher work honouring the dead as well as the living. From October to December 1918 Italy seemed like a factory working in full blast in complete accord with progress. War had left beyond its inevitable griefs a deep poetical vein in our national life. No one sensed it better, no one seemed more of a part in it, than I.

It was in this great historical moment, immediately after a victory achieved with untold hardship, that our young nation—younger as a nation than America—with traditions not yet seasoned by age, in spite of having thrown into the ardent brazier of the conflict, men and wealth, was treacherously deceived. Its fundamental trustfulness was played upon in the making of the Treaty of Versailles.

This is the awful toll that Italy paid in the Great War; 652,000 dead, 450,000 mutilated, 1,000,000 wounded.

There is not in our Country one single family who during the forty-one months of the War had not placed in the holocaust, on the Altar of the Country, a part of itself. I know every day, ten years later, that the mutilated, the wounded, the widows and orphans of war form a vast proportion of our population inspiring respect and homage of the multitude.

I never forget. We have gone through a thousand phases of internal troubles, from aberrations to a purifying revolution, yet—from Mount Stelvio to the Sea, in our mountain cemeteries which the hand of time slowly effaces —there remains the most powerful citadel of the fortune of our Nation and of our people. I never forget.

I had been the most tenacious believer in the War. I had fought with all my warm soul of Italian and soldier. I lived the joy of victory. I even lived in the midst of the unrest of after-War. But in every event, happy or sad, I have always had as a touch-stone, as a lighthouse, as a source of every advice and of deep wisdom, the memory of the dead. They are from every region and from every walk of life, even those who were under foreign yoke or emigrated to other countries. They gave their blood and were willing to offer the supreme sacrifice for the Mother Country. Until the time when a Nation has the right of sitting with proud head among other nations the surest sign of its strength, the highest title of its nobility, the vital food needed to reach greatness, will always be given by those who shed their blood and laid down their lives for their immortal Country.

These are the marks that War made upon one's body, one's mind, and one's soul.

Above all it gave to one, who was still young, an understanding of the essence of mankind.



MUSSOLINI AS A *BERSAGLIERI* DURING HIS EARLY SERVICE AS A SOLDIER

## CHAPTER III

### ASHES AND EMBERS

THE flame of War flickered and went out.

But the years 1919 and 1920 that followed immediately the end of the War seemed to me the darkest and most painful periods of Italian life. Dark thunderclouds hung above our unity. The progress of Italy's unification was threatened. I watched the gathering storm.

Already disquieting events had menaced our national life. They were due to political happenings, even more than to economical crisis. I point to the movement of the Sicilian Gasei in 1894 and the bloody demonstration in Milan in 1898. But these manifestations of rebellion were localized. Not one of them bore in it the virile germs of dissolution or of separatism. But I assert that the episodes of 1919 and 1920 had in them bacilli which, if not treated heroically, are deadly for the life of a civilized nation.

Everything was discussed again. We Italians opened the box of political problems and took apart the social clockwork. We pawed over everything from the Crown to Parliament, from the Army to our Colonies, from capitalistic property to the communistic soviet proposal for the federation of the regions of Italy, from schools to the Papacy. The lovely structure of concord and harmony that we combatants and the wounded had dreamed that we would build after the luminous victory of October 1918 was coming to pieces. The leaves were falling from our tree of idealism.

I felt that we were left without any cohesive force, any suggestive heroism, any remembrance, any political philosophy, sufficient to overcome and stop the factors of dissolution.

I sensed the chills and heats of decay and destruction.

Already in January 1919 the Socialists, slightly checked during the War, began the moment the ink was drying on the Armistice their work of rebellion and blackmail. From Milan the socialistic municipality sent a special mission and help to the so-called brothers in Vienna. Sickly Internationalism put forth its buds in this morbid springtime. At Trieste the Socialist Pittoni played an important part in the reorganization of the delivered city. In many Italian cities poor children of the old enemy Austrian and Hapsburg capital were asked to take a precedence. It was a provoking sentimentality. A desire was already clear in the minds of subversives and of Liberal-Giolittinians; it was to strike out of our memories the sense and feeling of our victory.

I knew those who whipped up our degeneration. They were German and Austrian spies, Russian agitators, mysterious subventions. In a few months they had led the Italian people into a state of marasmus. The economic crisis existing in every corner of the world could not be expected to spare Italy. The soldiers, like myself, returning from the War rushed to their families. Who can describe our feelings? Such an imposing phenomenon as the demobilization of millions of men took place in the dark without noise in an atmosphere of throwing discipline to the winds. There was, for us, the troubles of winter and the difficulties of finding new garments and adjustments for peace.

We suffered the humiliation of seeing the banners of our glorious regiments returned to their homes without

being saluted, without that warm cheer of sympathy owed to those who return from victorious war. Now, again, it appeared to me and to my friends as if there was in everybody an instinct to finish the game of the war not with the idea of real victory, but with content that he had lost as little as possible. Ears and spirits were ready to listen to words of peace, of humanity, of brotherhood between the nations. At night before sleep came I used to meditate and realize that we had no dam to stop this general decay of faith, this renunciation of the interests and destiny of a victorious nation. The sense of destruction penetrated very quickly and deeply the spirit of all classes. Certainly the central government was no dike to prevent the flood of weakness.

Politicians and philosophers; profiteers and losers, for at least many had lost their illusions; sharks trying to save themselves; promoters of the War trying to be pardoned; demagogues seeking popularity; spies and instigators of trouble waiting for the price of their treason; agents paid by foreign money; in a few months threw the Nation into an awful spiritual crisis. I saw before me with awe the gathering dusk of our end as a nation and a people.

With my heart in tumult and with a deep sense of bitterness corroding my soul, I could smell the danger. Some audacious men were with me—not many. My action was at first tied to the urgent duty to fight against one important and dark treason. Some Italians, blinded and having lost their memories, were led on by some complicity and selfish desires among the Allies. These Italians were actually setting themselves against the Mother Country. Dalmatia, Italian in its origins, ardent as a saint in its faith, had been recognized to be ours by the Pact of London. Dalmatia had waited for the victorious war with years of

passion, and, holding in its bosom still the remains of Venice and of Rome, was now lopped off from our unity. The politics of renunciation, helped by foreigners, galloped forward. Wilson was the distiller or supporter of theoretical formulas. He could not comprehend Italian life or history. By his unconscious aid this treason to us was nourished. Fiume, the sacrificed town, whose people called desperately for Italy in its manifestations on the public squares, who sent pleasing missions to our military chiefs, was occupied by corps of international troops. We were about to lose another war trophy; the Austrian Navy. Sesana, 20 kilometres from Trieste, was discussed as a possible frontier!

I said then that never in the life of any nation on the day after victory had there been a more odious tragedy than that of this silly renunciation. In the first months of 1919 Italy, led on by some of its politicians, had only one frantic wish that I could see: it was to destroy every gain of victorious struggle. Its only dedication was to a denial of the borders and soil-extent of the Nation. It forgot our 600,000 dead and our million wounded. It made waste of their generous blood. These leaders wanted to satisfy foreign impulses of doubtful origin and doctrines brewed of poisons. This attempt at matridice of the Motherland was abetted by Italians of perverted intellect and by professional Socialists. Toward both, later on, the Fascist revolution showed so much forbearance that it was more than generosity.

I was snatched up in this fight against the returning beasts of decadence. I was for our sacred rights to our own territories, therefore I had to neglect in a degree the petty internal political life that was floundering in bewilderment and wallowing in disorder. On the international playground the stake was higher. One had to remain on

the field to save what could be saved. As to internal politics, I knew very well that a strong Government would pût quickly in order the Socialists and the Anarchists, the decadents and wreckers and the instigators of disorder. I knew at first hand their soul. It has always been the same at all times, in all ages—it is the spirit of coward wolves and ferocious sheep.

And thus, one day, and precisely one Sunday, the 26th of February, 1919, a few months after the Armistice, I saw at Milan a fact more disquieting and more important than I thought possible. I saw a Socialist procession—with an endless number of red flags, with thirty bands, with ensigns cursing the War. I saw a river in the street made of women, children, Russian, German and Austrians, flowing through the town upwards and downwards from the popular quarters to those of the centre, and finally dispersing at one of the most central points of the town, at the amphitheatre of the Arena. They had had numerous meetings. They clamoured amnesty for the deserters. They demanded the division of the land!

Milan was then considered, more than now, the city where the pulse of the working nation could be felt. Milan, where I had laboured with ideals, had experienced in 1914, and in the first months of 1915, epic days for the War. The city always had a strong and gallant spirit. In it citizenship was more active than in many other parts of the Country. It had known how to prepare itself with dignity to sustain war effort. And now after the triumph even this town, the town of the ten thousand volunteers, seemed to yield herself to a disease.

This procession, I said, was an evidence of the deep mire in which all the classes of the population were sinking, especially those belonging to the *popolari*. As the procession passed through the streets the bourgeois, the

shopkeepers, the hotel keepers, closed hastily their windows and doors. They pulled down the roller-blinds. "There," said I, "are eyes closing with the weariness of anxiety and fear." Naturally enough the revolutionists observing their effect puffed up with new braggart triumph. Not a single force *interventista* or any other put their feet on to the street to stop the irresponsibles. The beloved tricolour flag of Italy was taken as a mark. It was hastily taken off balconies!

I remember an episode in the shame of these days; a woman, a school teacher in the popular quarters, ran to the defence of the Italian flag. Risking her life, she stood with blazing eyes against a herd of Communists. You may be sure that in the period of redemption and resurrection, when we stood upright again, the gold medal for valour was bestowed on this woman of saintly courage.

The *Popolo d' Italia*, of which I was the founder and editor, lived then its life of intense polemics. Every day was a battle. The little street of Via Paolo da Canuobio was constantly blocked by police or by detachments of carabinieri and soldiers. All of the staff were guarded whenever we appeared in public. One could understand that the Government was anxious about us. The authorities wanted to control all that the *Popolo d' Italia* was doing, and to curb all agitation for virile methods in the political struggle. The censorship was re-established exclusively and solely for the *Popolo d' Italia*. Through a back door channel a disgusting Socialist deputy tried also to bring about an inquiry. His proposal was ridiculed out of the door.

I wrote on the next day after the "Procession of the Defeat of Milan" an article the title of which was taken from a famous polemical book of Giordano Bruno, "Against the Return of the Beast."

That article was published in the *Popolo d' Italia* on the 18th of February, and ended in these precise words: "If the opposition to a war that is not only finished but was victorious, is now a pretext for an ignoble doubt, then we, who are not ashamed to have been *interventisti*, but feel the glory of our position, will shout to the heavens—'Stand back—you jackals!' No one shall separate the dead. They constitute a sacred heap, as big as a gigantic pyramid that touches the skies, a heap that belongs to everybody but belongs to nobody! Nobody can give or take away from the dead. They do not belong to any Party, they belong to the eternal Motherland. They belong to a humanity too complex and too august to be put into any wine club or into the back room of some co-operative. This political stew is supremely ignominious. Must we be forced to defend our dead from filthy profanation? Oh, Toti! Roman!—one man!—thy life and thy death is worth infinitely more than the whole Italian Socialism! And you files on parade—innumerable heroes that wanted the War, knowing how to want war; who went to war knowing what was war; who went to death knowing what it meant to go to death! You Decio Raggi, Filippo Corridoni, Cesare Battisti, Luigi Lori, Venezian, Sauro, Rismondi, Cantucci! You thousands and thousands of others that form the superb constellation of Italian heroism! Don't you feel that the pack of jackals is trying to rummage your bones? Do they want to scrape the earth that was soaked with your blood, and to spit on your sacrifice? Fear nothing, glorious spirits! Our task has just begun. No harm shall befall you. We shall defend you. We shall defend the dead, and all the dead, even though we put dug-outs in the public squares and trenches in the streets of the city."

That was a warning blast—a trumpet-call. Many hit

in the face fled. Some around us, trembling, thought of the danger that they might get into on account of such a polemic. But some others—not many—gathered around the old banner of my newspaper.

It was necessary to organize our resistance, to take care in discussions of international character, to strengthen our position on the front of internal politics, to be guarded from false friends, to fight false pacifists and to confound the false humanitarians. We had to make a general assault upon all that bundle of various degenerate tendencies, diverse in their appearance, but absolutely identical in their utter failure to understand the logical and absolute meaning of the victory in war.

Our delegation in Paris was in a sorry strait. The ability and the injustice of some of the Allied statesmen had strangled it almost. Owing to our internal situation it was impossible for our delegation to make a firm stand with well-planted feet. The regions to be restored to Italy were in a state of restlessness that made many of us anxious.

What a grave moment! An action of a handful of us on the public square was not sufficient; there were so many different fronts where one had to fight! We, who were to defend Italy from within, had to create one more unbreakable unity of strength, a common denominator of all the old pro-war partisans and loyalists—of all those that felt, like myself, desperately Italian. Then it was that I decided, after days and nights of reflection, to make a call through the medium of my newspaper for a full stop in the stumbling career toward chaos.

And on the 23rd of March, 1919, I laid down the fundamental basis at Milan, of the "Italian Fasci di combattimento"—the fighting Fascist programme.

The first meeting of the Italian battle-Fascists took place



MUSSOLINI AS A MEMBER OF THE *ARDITI* DURING THE WAR

on the Piazza S. Sepolero in Milan. It was in a hall offered to us by the Milan Association of Merchants and Shopkeepers. The permission was granted after a long discussion between the managers of the Association. Common-sense prevailed in the end; a guarantee was given that no noise or disorder would happen. On that condition we got what we wanted.

The meeting was of a purely political character. I had advertised in the *Popolo d' Italia* that it would have for its object the foundation of a new movement, and the establishment of a programme and of methods of action for the success of the battle I was intending to fight against the forces dissolving victory and Nation.

I prepared the atmosphere of that memorable meeting by editorials and summons published in the *Popolo d' Italia.* Anyhow, the ones that came were not numerous. One of my fighting friends of goodwill was in the hall and he took the names of those who were willing to sign on. After two days of discussion, fifty-four persons signed our programmes and took the pledge to be faithful to the fundamental basis of our movement.

I speak of " movement " and not of " party," because my conception always was that Fascismo must assume the characteristics of being anti-party. It was not to be tied to old or new schools of any kind. The name " Italian Fighting Fascisti " was lucky. It was most appropriate to a political action that had to face all the old parasites and programmes that had tried to deprave Italy. I felt that it was not only the anti-Socialist battle we had to fight; this was only a battle on the way. There was a lot more to do. All the conceptions of the so-called historical parties seemed to be dresses out of measure, shape, style, usefulness. They had grown tawdry and insufficient—unable to keep pace with the rising tide of unexpected political exigencies,

unable to adjust the formation of new history and new conditions of modern life.

The old parties clung in vain to the rattling programme. These parties had to make pitiful repairs and tinkerings in an attempt to adapt their theories as best they could to the new days. It was therefore not sufficient to create—as some have said superficially—an anti-altar to the altar of Socialism—it was necessary to imagine a wholly new political conception, adequate to the living reality of the 20th century—overcoming at the same time the ideological worship of liberalism, the limited horizons of various spent and exhausted democracies, and finally the violently Utopian spirit of Bolshevism.

In a word, I felt the deep necessity of an original conception capable of placing in a new period of history a more fruitful rhythm of human life.

It was necessary to lay the foundation of a new civilization.

To this end—through every day's observation of events and change, in morning and in evening, in vigour and in weariness—I aimed all my strength. I had a perfect and sure consciousness of the end I was driving at. This was my problem—to find the way, to find the moment, to find the form.

Those discussions over which I presided and dominated strengthened some of my conceptions that still conserve to-day the freshness of the original idea. Later, in this review of my life until now, I shall take up some of the details of the evolution of our plans. At our meetings there were present various elements—syndicalists, old interventionists, demobilized officers still in uniform, and many Arditi, those brave grenade and knife-shock troops of the War.

The Italian Arditi were a creation of the War. The idea

was born in Garibaldi's impetuous fighting vigour and dash, and finds its remote origins in the heroical city militias that flourished in many parts of Italy at the happy time of the townships—the communes. The Arditi rendered first-class service during the War. They were our troops of assault, of the first rush. They threw themselves into the battle with bombs in hands, with daggers in the teeth, with a supreme contempt for death, singing their magnificent war-hymns. There was in them not only the sense of heroism, but an indomitable will.

This typically Italian formation lived on after the War. The first fighting Fascisti were formed mostly of decided men. They were full of will and courage. In the first years of the anti-Socialist, anti-Communist struggle the Arditi war veterans played an important rôle. I was nominated several times their chief and still now hold the title of honorary President of the Arditi Association, that has assumed now a purely relief character with the idea of maintaining intact its spirit of civic and military virtues.

Those who came to the meeting for the constitution of the Italian Fascisti of Combat used few words. They did not exhaust themselves by laying out dreams. Their aim seemed clear and straight-lined—it was to defend the Victory at any price, to maintain intact the sacred memory of the dead and the admiration not only for those who fell and for the families of those who were dead, but for the mutilated, for the invalids, for all those who had fought. The prevalent note, however, was of anti-Socialist character and, as a political aspiration, it was hoped a new Italy would be created that would know how to put in value the Victory and to fight with all its strength against treason and corruption, against decay within and intrigue and avarice from without.

There are some who profess not to understand what Fascimo had as its intent, and some who believe that it grew without a gardener. I was certain at the time that it was necessary to fix, without any possibility of equivocation, the essential brand of the new movement. For this reason I made three planks for our platform. The first was the following:

" The meeting of the 23rd of March sends its first greeting and reverent thought to the Sons of Italy who died for the greatness of their Country and for the freedom of the world; to the mutilated and to the invalids, to all those who fought, to the ex-prisoners who fulfilled their duty. It declares itself ready to uphold with all its energy the material and moral claims that will be put forward by the Associations of those who fought."

The second declaration pledged the Fascisti of Combat to oppose themselves to the imperialism of any other countries damaging to Italy. It accepted the supreme postulates of the Society of Nations regarding Italy. It affirmed the necessity to complete the stability of our frontiers between the Alps and the Adriatic with the claim of annexation of Fiume and of Dalmatia.

The third declaration spoke of the elections that were announced for a new future. In this motion the " Fasci di Combattimento " obliged themselves to fight with all their means the candidates that were milk-and-water Italians to whatever party they belonged.

Finally, we talked of organization—the organization that would be adapted to the new movement. I did not favour any bureaucratic, cut-and-dried organization. It was thought wise that in every big town the correspondent of the *Popolo d' Italia* should be the organizer of a section of the " Fasci di Combattimento " with the idea that each group should become a centre of Fascisti ideas, work and

action. The first expenses—amounting to a few thousand lires—were covered by the feeble resources of the *Popolo d' Italia!* A central committee was formed to guide the whole movement.

It is amusing for me to recall that this meeting remained almost unnoticed. The stupid irony of the Socialists and the narrow-minded incomprehensiveness of the Italian Liberal Party could not grasp its significance.

The *Corriere della Sera,* that great Liberal newspaper, dedicated to this news about twenty lines in its columns.

The internal situation in Italian politics and Italian policy continued to be full of uncertainty and nebulous.

Disillusion and the shattering of ideals could be noticed even among those who had fought. A sense of weariness dominated all classes—everyone. The Church that had put herself apart during the great European conflict, now started activity in order to have her voice listened to at the peace negotiations, and to have a say about all the questions that interested the nations who had taken part in the War.

So far as our national life was concerned, the Church limited her action to the creation of the Partito Popolare—the so-called Popular or " Catholic " Party. It was faithful to some important programme points regarding the family, and religion and the Nation. It represented at that time an attempt to stop the preoccupying diffusion of those Bolshevik ideas of Socialistic Parliamentary systems that were then disintegrating Rome and the Provinces. But the Partito Popolare itself ran off the rails and jumped the fences; it tried to compete with the Socialists themselves. Of little and doubtful patriotic faith, it ran square against the Fascisti and the " interventisti." The Popular Party, along with the others, was too much in a hurry to close the parenthesis of the War.

Political riots, disturbances and strikes took place alternately in a kind of sickly rotation in every Italian city.

It is necessary for me to review the conditions which we faced. Orlando, President of the Council, was incapacitated by temperament to dominate the internal situation, just as he was unable to be a master in foreign affairs. His work was contradictory, full of false sentimentality, and failures to comprehend the real interests of Italy. Not knowing French and ignorant of the treaties concluded with the Allied Nations, Orlando, in spite of the presence of Sonnino, was a disastrous influence during the peace negotiations at Versailles. Wilson, so far as Italy was concerned, was ambiguous, so much so that on the 23rd of April the Italian Delegation had to leave Paris. It returned on the 5th of May—a dubious situation. In June, after a vote of the Chamber, the Orlando Cabinet retired. In the meantime—also in June—serious clashes took place at Fiume between French sailors and Italian soldiers.

Never did Italy have a man so damaging to the Italian interests and programmes than he who came next—Nitti.

He was and remains a personality that was and is the negation of any ideal of life and of manly conflict. He has a fairly good knowledge of finances. He is impudent in his assertions. He is intensely egocentric. He always wants to play the most important part in Cabinets, whether he is President of the Council or simply a Minister.

His first act when he came into power was the granting of an amnesty. This amnesty was followed by two others: the first had a character of general principle and I approved it, but by granting the two others Nitti committed a great moral crime, for he abolished the difference between those who wore the ensigns of valour in sacrifice and those who

had basely betrayed the Nation during the War, and even had gone over to the enemy!

All the work of Nitti was fish-bait for the approbation of the Socialists. He conceived the ambition of holding the Presidency of a future Italian republic. His measures, which wore demagogic dress, did not prevent disorders nor devastations, sometimes brought about with the cost of lives. He never would face Bolshevism and the dissolutive forces in the open field. He had a decree issued and signed by the King establishing the price of bread; he had it withdrawn on the next day and replaced by another decree, also signed by His Majesty.

There was no point in the national life that he failed to bring up for discussion. All this puffed up the Socialists. They laughed in their sleeves as they foresaw a strong political success for them at the elections. The elections had to take place under the proportional system! The Socialists would become, through the election battle, masters of the Italian political life!

It seemed to me that the season was our summer of torment and resolve.

In June 1919 the Treaty of Peace with Germany was consummated at Versailles. The event for Europe was the end of a nightmare. The continual disillusions, the reserves and the protests of Germany and the diatribes between the Allies constituted a permanent danger and a reason for anxiety for many nations. The conclusion of the Treaty was therefore, for them, a liberation.

For Italy, on the contrary, it was a complete shattering of ideals. We had won the War; we were utterly defeated in the diplomatic battle. We were losing—except Zara—the whole of Dalmatia, our land by tradition and history, by manners and customs, by the language talked and by the ardent and constant aspirations of the Dalmatians

towards the Mother Country. Fiume, most Italian of cities, was contested. The colonial problem was resolved for us in an absolutely negative way. To a nation like ours, powerful and prolific, that has a need of raw materials, of outlets, of markets and of land on account of the exuberance of its population, only some insignificant rectifications of frontiers were granted when the glut of Colonial spoil was passed around.

I could feel the discontent oozing down through our masses and infecting the "combattanti" themselves. Once more Italy, who had thrown into the conflict men, means, patrimony and youth, went out of a peace settlement with empty hands and manifold disillusions.

The Nitti Government, with its continuous note of pessimism, was doing no better than to describe our situation as near to bankruptcy, economic as well as political! Nitti himself, his newspapers and his acolytes, tried to make the Italian people believe that the Versailles Treaty was for us the best result obtainable. A sense of humiliation had crawled over our whole peninsula; but many there were who did not want to resign themselves to accept the tragic facts. No one knows better than I that many meditated in sullen silence most desperate actions.

The Government was watching the turn of the psychological tide, whilst in the practical field it did not know what to do except to prepare and revise the mechanism of an election law with a vicious proportional system. In the field of destruction it reached an unbelievable decision to demobilize the aviation camps and, to cap the climax, in August 1919 the Report of the Commission of Inquiry on the painful episode of Caporetto was published.

I thought to myself, "This is fat on the fire!" The *Avanti*, a Socialist newspaper that for the time being was published in three editions, one at Turin, one at Rome and



MUSSOLINI AT THE TIME WHEN HE WAS A SOCIALIST

one at Milan, had started a ferocious campaign against the army. On account of a strike of typographers the *Avanti* was the only newspaper published in Rome for two months! During street demonstrations officers, merely because they were in uniform, were insulted and assaulted. Charity toward the dignity of the Nation prevents my presentation of episodes that now make the worst blackguards blush. The few Fascisti that had accomplished an act of faith in March 1919, now met in all their work enormous difficulties. They were isolated, attacked, spied upon, sometimes by the subversives, sometimes by the Government.

Every day in the *Popolo d' Italia* I wrote about the painful bath of fire of the "combattanti," about the inflamed pride of the volunteers, about the necessity of concord, about the sordid hostility of the Government that did not feel the beauty and the greatness of the sense of patriotic heroism. Gabriel D'Annunzio, the poet, who lived in Rome, wrote that his approbation "of my good shots was trembling with admiration."

Victory was losing every day her laurel leaves in spite of all. The National Parliament was discussing and approving the new election laws. Disorders and blackmailing the Government were on the daily calendar. The debates had a character of pettiness and gossip and the flavour of a base world that knew nothing of war, virtue or heroism.

"Elections! Elections! Elections!" thought I, "these constitute the only subject that is able to rise to its feet in the Italian Parliament!"

Incidents had taken place at Fiume, between Italians and French sailors, and the population of that city did not hide its growing hostility toward the Allies. The latter, therefore, planned to have the city garrisoned by a mixed corps of their troops. So Fiume, a city purely and virilely

of Italian stamp, had a mosaic of troops. It was the summit of inefficiency and, what is more, of stupidity.

D'Annunzio, who was trembling in his solitude, told me that he contemplated with grim brooding the taking of Fiume by force. There was no other way of salvation. Everything seemed to be lost. There were only a handful of men with the poet. But they were the most trustworthy elements of our Army. They were old volunteers. They were Fascists that felt once again in the incandescent atmosphere of the streets of Rome and other cities the poetry of the War and of the Victory. They started, armed, from Ronchi.

The occupation of Fiume, at the moment when the English sailors were getting ready to evacuate it, was rapid and fulminant. The Government, as soon as it knew the truth, wanted to rush to offset the raid. It meditated the blockade, it sent thunder against the rebels. But D'Annunzio and his legionnaires, having prepared their action in silence, now threw down a gauntlet of audacious challenge to the Nittian triflings.

Gabriel D'Annunzio, before starting from Ronchi, wrote me the following letter:

"DEAR COMPANION,

"The dice are on the table. To-morrow I shall take Fiume with force of arms. The God of Italy assist us!

"I arise from bed with fever. But it is impossible to delay. Once more the spirit dominates the miserable flesh.

"Sum up the article that the *Gazette del Popolo* will publish; give the end in full.

"Sustain the cause without stint during the conflict.

"I embrace you,

"GABRIEL D'ANNUNZIO.

"11 *September*, 1919."

The Italian atmosphere, for so long checked and humiliated, exploded like Vesuvius after the announcement of the new "D'Annunzian" gesture. Again we heard the tune of high sentiments of fraternity and of enthusiasm. Again we felt the spirit of May 1915. The best of our manhood felt the breath of poetry that came from this sacred liberation carried on in the face of the policy of the Nittian Government.

The Fascisti were amongst the ardent legionnaries of Fiume, whilst at home they were leading resistance against the defeatists, old and new. The Italian colonists all over the world—those colonists who had followed with anxiety and with unspeakable fright the negotiations of Versailles—sent money in great quantity for D'Annunzio's expedition. Fiume felt the intuition of its salvation. Manifestations of frantic enthusiasm. Audacity had repaired injustice; the city was strongly held, so that it could resist by force of arms and with courage all the Nittian or international interference.

The President of the Council, Nitti, in Parliament on this occasion took an ignoble attitude. He summoned up the dangerous idea of protest by a general strike; by his ambiguous language he invited the classes which leaned toward Socialism, and especially the Socialists and Radicals themselves, to agitate for street demonstrations against D'Annunzio's enterprise.

Nitti, after conversations with Trumbic, the Jugo-Slav Minister, saw all his tangled and slimy net of humiliating understandings going to pieces by the will of a few brave boys.

Nitti thought and acted only as a consequence of physical fear. Attacked forefront and exasperated in his mad and miserable dream, he plotted with every means to overcome the resistance of the Fiumean legionnaries. The soldiers were declared deserters. The city was blockaded so that

economic pressure would squeeze the spirit of the citizens. Parliament was closed and the elections were fixed for the 16th November, 1919, under the troublesome proportional system.

The elections re-established, for a moment, an apparent truce. Every party wanted to measure the masses and the groupings. The Socialists, who were speculating on the misfortunes of the War and were pointing to the danger of another war due to the D'Annunzian enterprise, were the favourites. The Church, that in politics always has an ambiguous attitude, pressed on the action of the priests in the villages so that the Partito Popolare, that had been created originally by the lay Catholics, in service of the Church policy, might play the preponderant part in Parliament. The Liberals, Democrats and some Radicals built up a block that passed under the name of "the forces of order." They were changeable forces, without any ideal base and without precise aims. They were another grouping among groupings whose futilities I had observed for years.

I wanted the Fascisti to try alone the chance of the elections. We did not ally ourselves with any other party, even with the nearest to them, the Nationalists. The atmosphere was against us, but it was necessary to count our own heads. It was necessary to know, even through the means of elections, what point had been reached by the Italian nation in moral disintegration and in moral reawakening as a victorious nation. I created an electoral committee with little means but with courage enough. I ordered meetings for the principal towns of Italy and especially in Milan.

I remember so vividly the meeting on Piazza Belgioioso. How typical it was! The place was a lonesome corner of old Milan where from a camion, that was used for a tribune,

on a dark night, by the light of torches, I addressed a big closely pressed crowd. They were people not only from Milan but from other towns. The Fascisti of Bologna, of Turin, of Rome and of Naples had in fact sent their representatives in order to have precise rules and sure orders for the impending electoral battle.

I made on this ocasion some declarations of principles that still stand in the Fascisti line. They have served me as a guide in all my political actions.

I said that revolutions were not to be denied "a priori," that they may be discussed. I said that the Italian people could not copy Russian Bolshevism. We have in the history of our political struggles our own elements of greatness of concept. These have given to the spirit of the time all the strength of their Italian genius and the qualities of their Italian courage.

"If a revolution," said I, "has to take place, it is necessary to make one typically Italian, on the magnificent dimensions of the ideas of Mazzini and with the spirit of Carlo Pisacane!"

I had already, clear and strong, in my mind the concept of complete rebellion against the decrepit old State that did not know itself how to die.

The elections of the 16th of November took place and the Fascistis were beaten. I faced, and all of us faced, complete defeat. Not one of us had necessary votes to become a member of Parliament. Some Nationalists saved themselves in Rome and were later excellent interpreters of the national idea in the wallow of general bewilderment. At Milan, I was a long way off from the number of votes necessary to be elected. It was tragic—our record, but in the passage of time it is amusing and may be remembered by all losers.

Our uneasiness was now profound. The crowd was anti-Fascist. Under the skin of the population a sad illusion

was being fed; in their minds a dark hope was stirring. The coming of Bolshevism! The plan for seizing the means of production, the installation of the Soviets of Italy!

*L' Avanti* had already published the general scheme and its details. My defeat did not bother me from any personal consideration. It gave me a clear and precise idea of the desperateness of our situation. The Socialist newspaper wrote on that occasion a short notice about me. "A dead body has been fished up from the Naviglio." It was said in this note that in the night, in the modest Naviglio canal that cuts Milan in two, a dead body had been picked up. According to the documents they said it could be identified as the dead body of Benito Mussolini—his political corpse. They did not say that its eyes were gazing ahead.

Amidst the general feast of their victory the Socialists did not forget to imitate a regular funeral. This parade passed through the streets with a coffin, surrounded with burning candles. There were ribald psalms on the air. The strange procession, however, showed the distress and shoddiness of its ranks; it passed up and down the city of Milan—a city that had become now the absolute property of the Socialists. The procession passed under the windows of my house, where my family was living in anxiety amidst the general anxieties and with violence trembling in the air. I have not forgotten the episode, but I always see it in its frame—the frame of the misery and of the threadbareness of the paraders.

The elections had given 150 seats to the Socialists in Parliament. They were themselves frightened by their staggering success. The situation was saved by the south of Italy, always more faithful to men than to organized mass parties.

The victory, of course, swelled up in most Socialists a

desire to dominate. It distended their impudent abuse of power. Enormous processions with red flags, howling on the streets, strikes called not for protest but for celebration occupied a whole week.

At Milan a crowd of thirty thousand demanded that the red flag should be exposed on the Municipal Building. During the cock-crowing over victory all the institutions, rules and regulations and orderly life were upset.

Nobody thought about work. That last of all! Only an audacious handful formed by Fascisti, Arditis and Fiumean elements resisted the intoxication. An incident was provoked because of this. Bombs were thrown, a few were killed and many wounded. A commission of Socialist members of Parliament, headed by Filippo Turati, marched up the stairs of the "Prefettura"—the Governor's office of Milan—to claim my arrest, and the arrest of the Fascisti chiefs.

That was an episode of political partizanship useless and evil. The authorities showed weakness and fear. They wanted to give satisfaction to the Socialists. But my clear and straight-lined political action did not suffer from this abuse of power. Having been let out after only one day of imprisonment, I consulted with my associates as to the whole work before us. What should we do now? How could we act before the damage to Italy became irreparable?

The electoral tragedy had broken up our Central Committee. Many of us had been arrested, many threatened had disappeared. Little by little, calm having been restored, I rewove at the *Popolo d' Italia* the fabric of our cause and tried to build again the structure of our organization. In various meetings I explained the gravity of the Italian situation. I spoke independently of the particular attitude of the Fascisti.

The victory of the Socialists was a danger not so much because of the fact itself, as because of the phenomenal retreat to their holes of all the weak and the incapables which followed the day after the Socialist victory. That victory crushed the Liberals and the Democrats. For some time a low, furtive literature of propaganda had spread stories about disquieting episodes in the defeated German and Austrian countries. This literature spun narratives about professors obliged to become servants and scullions, Russian princesses engaged as ballet dancers, generals that were selling matches on the streets. All this put together with the Socialist victory produced a wave of fright in all classes, and I could see a serious fact of corruption and political paralysis. The old parties had been beaten by Pussyfoot Socialism. That Socialism had no aim. It was victorious only through cowardice in the others, and because of the general uneasiness in the population. Certainly it did not win on any declaration of a great faith.

I did not fold under the smallest edge of my flag. From my editor's office that was getting thinner and thinner, to my readers that were getting rarer and rarer, I addressed the most bitter and severe exhortations to resist, resist, resist.

I made a little fortress out of the editor's office. The newspaper was sequestrated and censored every day; but notwithstanding difficulties and lack of means, I succeeded in keeping the little paper alive. I was throttled by the skinny hand of poverty. I could have sold, out but I held on.

So that it might be completely withdrawn from circulation various messengers of the Nittian Government came to me advising me to go and study the autonomous republics of Southern Russia. I understood the double game. They



BENITO MUSSOLINI

acted with me as they acted with D'Annunzio when they advised him to try the flight from Rome to Tokio. But D'Annunzio was now still resisting at Fiume, and I, with my newspaper, was renewing and reassembling the dispersed ranks of the Fascisti. I held meetings constantly. Not for a moment did I cease my activity. It cannot be said that I failed to look the triumphant beast in the face.

One day, just after the elections, I had to go personally, because of postal regulations, to the money-order window of the main post office in Milan. I was to receive some considerable contributions that Italians from over-sea colonies were sending for the Fiume enterprise. In the huge buildings of the Central Post Office one could still see visible signs of the elections; the murmur of the discussions, the stencilled inscriptions on the walls were all there. I presented myself with my brother Arnaldo at the window of the money-order office.

The Bolshevik clerk, with evident irony, said I had to make myself known. He did not know "any certain Benito Mussolini." A short discussion arose that attracted other Bolshevik elements, who amused themselves by affirming that nobody knew Benito Mussolini. The development of this discussion, impudently provoking, was stopped by an old clerk of the post office, a faithful servant of the State who certainly was not intoxicated by the Socialist success. He said, "Pay this money transfer. Do not be silly. Mussolini has a name that is not only known now here, but will be known and judged all over the world."

I have never learned the name of this gentleman. He was straight and fair.

Some symptoms of reaction against the Socialist victory were to be noticed now. One day at the editor's office of the newspaper, facing the anxieties of my associates and

the doubts of some half-consciences in my service, I felt it necessary to disclose my own hopes and faiths:

" Don't fear. Italy will heal herself from this illness. But without our watchfulness it might be deadly. We will resist. Resist! I should say so. Indeed, within two years I will have my turn."

## CHAPTER IV

### THE DEATH STRUGGLE OF A WORN-OUT DEMOCRACY

I HAVE little doubt that all inefficient Party and Parliamentary Governments die from the same causes and with the same typical mannerisms of decay.

I have watched one die and have been present to hear the raucous drawings of its last breaths.

But these were times which tried the souls of us. We saw passing before our eyes the dreadful panorama of chaos and of evil forces which had broken into a gallop, ridiculous to behold, tragic beyond words to one who loved his country, Above all, these forces were trivial and insincere.

The political elections of November 16th, 1919, had painted and glossed over Italian political life with a mere veneer of quiet. Not one of the weighty problems of domestic or foreign policy for which a quick brave solution was needed was yet even put under the microscope for study. Everything was boiled up in the joust of political parties. There was the usual seethe of inconsequential prophecy about the new ministerial combination.

The Socialists dominated the scene. They continually harassed the Government, while it was preoccupied on account of the attitude of the Extreme Left—Communists.

The occasion of the Crown-speech, at the beginning of the 21st Legislature, was upon us. For this ceremony there had been some worry on the part of Nitti. He tried to hold the Socialists in check. But they could not help

showing their cold hostility to the King. I was told in advance that they would refuse to be present in the Hall during the King's speech.

On the day of the opening of the Chamber, when the King was solemnly entering the Hall of Parliament, what was the demonstration? The Socialists made a parade of their pinks in their button-holes and went out in groups singing the "Hymn of Workers" and "The International." With them, giving a clumsy show of doubtful political taste, filed the Republicans, the Independents and Members of the Left.

The speech of the Crown did not take a clear position against the subversive forces which were menacing nothing less than our whole national unity. It forgot the question of Fiume—a torch which held out a flame for our national spirit. The speech even renounced some sovereign prerogatives. It conceded a good share of the Crown patrimony, in behalf of the war veterans, combatants, and wounded, for they were also full of evident signs of restlessness. Furthermore, in a period when foreign policies were in a snarl and the economic crisis serious indeed, I could see little else beside the petty shifts and manœuvres of Parliamentary cloak-rooms and corridors in the same old disgusting struggle to grab places in the Ministry.

During the first three months the Ministry of Nitti fell three times at the Chamber. It outlived itself and then succeeded itself!

The *Stampa*, an old Piedmont newspaper, Liberal in character, began to be willing to indict the War. It began an attempt to carry in triumph the very man who was the breeder and teacher of being neutral—Giovanni Giolitti. The Church, together with the Popular Party, wanted to draw the most profit from the abnormal situation. The Socialists revealed themselves very badly prepared for their

victory. Victory had only set them down in a marsh of trouble; I knew that they could not create an equilibrium between the Communists and the Extreme Right. On one side it was the Nation; on the other politics—inefficient, empty politics.

Meanwhile Gabriele D'Annunzio, in Fiume, was resisting with his legionnaires the flatteries of political secret agents, whom we all knew were pouring into Fiume and was resisting also the blockade. Fascism was setting in order again its disunited ranks after the electoral defeat of November 16th, 1919, and the light was everywhere dim and the atmosphere murky with selfish, small, cowardly breathings. Nevertheless, we began to see our thoroughfare.

To reorganize the ranks of Fascism was not a matter of impossible difficulty, because the Fasci of Combattimento—"Bundles of Fight"—had learned discipline and enthusiasm, we could stand our shocks from mere electoral vicissitudes. And on the other hand, some strategic leadership began to show itself at Florence, where, in October 1919, there was held the first international meeting of the Italian Fasci di Combattimento. What a characteristic meeting! The adherents were obliged to defend the liberty of assembling by the voice of the revolver. Florence, a city having a tradition of kindness and hospitality, received the Fascists with violent hostility. Ambushes! Provocations! Nevertheless the meeting was held. Our friends were able to control the place. By great energy they broke down resistance and suppressed the unprovoked violences of our opponents.

The meeting of Florence wrote the real problem of Government across the sky. On October 9th, by way of starting that sky writing, I made an unadorned speech. I made clear appeal to the subversive forces of the Nation. On the next day, after a sharp needle-point speech of the

poet F. T. Marinetti, the Secretary, Pasella, presented a resolution in which the Fasci di Combattimento claimed the right to formulate for Italy a fundamental transformation of the State. It was a clearly defined programme of political convenience and expediency ready to create a social and economic State—absolutely new.

I have interpreted and carried out that purpose.

If the end I now seek is to disclose the paths which have led to the development of the self I am, then surely it was during this period of training and test, of trial and error, that may be found the most significant guide-posts.

The programme of the Fasci was approved to a man. There indeed was the disclosed warning of the Fascist Regime to come. To the Regime's problem, however, there was being added—and sharp it was—the problem of the syndicate. For that reason, during the afternoon sitting of October 10th, I, myself, proposed a resolution which declared "adhesion to the movement of economic deliverance and autonomy of the worker." We sent a greeting "to all those numerous groups of proletarians and employees who are not willing to submit to the leadership of political parties composed and controlled chiefly by little and big mediocrity which is now trying, by impoverishing and mystifying the masses, to gain applause and salaries." I often wonder if other nations do not feel the same.

The whole spirit of that meeting, which closed with a greeting to Fiume, was able to rivet the old conceptions of the irreconcilableness and of fight.

I arrived at Florence, coming from Fiume, where I had gone by aeroplane. There had been a long, affectionate and definite heart-to-heart talk with Gabriele D'Annunzio about all that was needed to be done in Italy. On my journey back the plane, on account of the *bora*, a violent wind of

the Upper Adriatic, was obliged to come down on the Aviation Field at Aiello, in the Province of Udine. Chafing under the delay, I continued my journey to Florence by train, where I came just in time to preside at the meeting, and to take what may be called a lively part in our resistance against the violence of our opponents. At the bottom, I was the most harassed in spirit of all who were there.

But to the eyes of the glowing crowd I was a patriot, a preacher of resistance, he who succeeded through the violent articles written from day to day in the *Popolo d' Italia* in beginning the smashing of Bolshevism. The meeting was ended in Fascist style ; we swore to see each other again, we promised ourselves victory at any price.

I set out from Florence by auto to go to Romagna. The machine was driven by Guido Pancani, well-known in Florence in his capacity of War volunteer and aeroplane pilot—a great athlete. In the same machine there were also the brother-in-law of Pancani, Ganstone Galvani, and Leandro Arpinati, of the railway workshops of Bologna, since then well-known in the political clubs. When we came to Faenza, the auto stopped before the Orpheum coffee-shop, where I met and greeted some old friends of mine. On continuing our way the auto, driven at full speed, crashed into a railway crossing with closed gates. Under our terrible impact the first iron railing was broken to pieces and the auto was hurled over the rails, on to the second barrier. We were all, with the exception of the driver, Pancani, flung yards away, like toy men. I, who came out unhurt, and Arpinati, who had been lightly bruised, went shouting for help for our two friends who were groaning in agony. People arrived, the injured men were laid down in our auto which, dragged by oxen, conveyed the two wounded to the hospital of Faenza. During the surgical treatments I also helped the two patients. I did what I could to

comfort them. Finally I departed again by train to Bologna. The incident might have had greater consequences, but fortune assisted me; I felt that the hatred of our adversaries had been my talisman.

Already I have told how, after the electoral defeat of November 16th, 1919, some of my friends were terrified and others asserted how useless it was to go against the stream. They said—for there are always minds of this type—that it was much better to come to an agreement with the opposition, which in those days held all strategic political positions and dominated the Parliament. Compromise, negotiation and agreements were offered me.

I rejected flatly any agreements whatever. I did not admit even one moment's thought of coming to a covenant with those who had repudiated our Italy in War and now were betraying her in peace. Not many understood me—not even those close to me. Two of my editors on the *Popolo d' Italia*, my newspaper, asked permission to leave. They made their excuses on the grounds that they had moved from their political streets and house numbers. They even accused me of having helped myself—during the electoral fight—with funds gathered by the *Popolo d' Italia* in the cause of smarting Fiume. So I have seen myself—a bitter experience—obliged to defend myself from those who have been my friends.

I appeared before the Convention of the Lombardian journalists demanding opportunity to hear and be heard as to the charges made. My justification was ample and precise. The Board was forced by the facts to do me justice. And afterward, without waiting for the hour of my triumphs, the selfsame slanderers of mine, it is fair to say, made honourable amends for their errors.

But meanwhile, taking a pretext from this episode, there was launched against me the furious wrath of the



RACHELE MUSSOLINI, THE *DUCE'S* WIFE

Socialists and of the members of the Popular Party, led by the priests. Ferrets were sent to smell into my life. Soldiers and police were bribed. Secret inquiries were made into my everyday routine, into all my acts, all my beliefs. The deluded, the rejected, the unmindful—all whom my upright and fierce soul had fired at in some way or another—gathered against me. They could do nothing. In spite of the investigation in its length and breadth, up high and down low, no dragon was dredged out of my pool. As for the disposition of the funds for the Fiume campaign and other unworthy calumnies, I published in my newspaper documents and testimony which could never be refuted.

The conclusion arrived at then has been and always will be the same until I cease to exist; on the field of integrity there is no assault to be made upon me. My political work may be valued more or less this way or that, and so people may shout me up or howl me down, but in the moral field it is another matter. Men must live in harmony with the faith by which they are pushed on; they must be inspired to the most absolute disinterestedness. True men, in politics, must be animated by the humane and devout sense; they must have a regard, a love, and a deep vision toward their own fellow-creatures. And all these qualities must not be defiled by dissimulations, or rhetoric, or flatteries, or compromises, or servile concessions. On this ground at least I am proud to know myself as one not to be suspected—even by myself—and feeling as to my inmost moral fibre that this fibre is invincible.

I believe that this, above all else, has been the stuff and fabric of my strength and of my success.

The beginning of 1920 found Italy engaged with a most difficult international situation. While in Paris the diplomats were discussing sordidly, the bleeding wound of Dalmatia was yet open and in it was D'Annunzio at Fiume. The

Socialists, to be sure, had obtained a boisterous electoral victory, but they proved from day to day more and more impotent and incapable of maintaining their positions in government with dignity. The most temperate were overturned by the extremists. There was the gorgeous myth of Lenin. The Italian Liberal Party had resigned all its prerogatives. The Ministry was living from day to day, at the mercy of political extortions, of blackmail, of those who wanted special favours. There was turbulence in Parliament and uproars of a political nature on the streets.

Under such conditions it was necessary to struggle, even though sometimes victory seemed very difficult and almost unattainable. I started the year by an article entitled "Let's Navigate." I said: "Two religions are to-day contending with each other for the sway over the world; the black and the red. From two Vaticans depart to-day encyclical letters; from that of Rome and from that of Moscow. We declare ourselves the heretics of these two expressions. We are exempt from contagion. The issue of the battle is of a secondary importance to us. To us the fight has the prize in itself, though it be not crowned by victory. The world now has some strange analogy with that of Julian the Apostate. The Galileo with the red hair! Will he be a winner again? Or will the winner be the Mongol Galileo of Kremlin? Will there be realized the 'upsetting' of all valiant and virile thought?"

"These questions weigh upon the uneasy spirits of our contemporaries."

"But in the meantime it is necessary to steer a ship! Even against the stream. Even against the flow. Even if shipwreck is waiting for the solitary and haughty bearers of heresy."

There was little time to spare in order to dwell upon these highbrow controversies. Events were tumbling over

in a most troubled way. In the month of January, after harsh discussion, it appeared impossible to avoid a threatened railway strike. Soon after the general strike of the post and telephone employees burst out and lasted six days. It disorganized not only the private interests of citizens, but also State communications. It cut off the shuttle of thoughts in a moment made even more delicate by the international situation. The *Avanti*, the official newspaper of the Socialist Party, of which I had once been editor, wrote on that occasion that the post, telegraph and telephone offices were a luxury of modern times, that the ancient peoples had been great even without telegraphic apparatus. . . . Who knows whether this gibberish came from a mocking spirit or from the kind of confirmed idiocy with which extremists are afflicted ?

The stated cause of the agitations was always economic, but in truth the end was wholly political ; the real intention was to strike a full blow in the face of the State's authority, against the middle classes and against disciplined order, with a view to establishing the Soviets in Italy. That was the plain purpose behind all the ornaments and masks. It is little realized how easily a combination of disorder can put a whole nation—by control of its exchanges and its communications and cities—in the hands of a tyrannous minority.

In the midst of general hardships and of cowardice, of grumbling of impotents, of the vaporings of dull critics, I, almost alone, had the courage to write that the State's employees, if they were right in view of the feebleness of the Government, were wrong, in any case, toward the Nation. To inflict upon a people the mortification of an ill-advised strike, to trample upon the rights of the whole, meant to lead men from modern civil life back again to tribal conflict.

"These dissensions," I wrote in my paper on January 15th, 1920, "are between function and Government. The sufferer who suffers after having paid, the sufferer with the inevitable prospect of paying more is the Italian Nation,—the Nation understood the word in the sense of human collectivity." And further on I added: "The material damages of a strike of this kind are enormous, incalculable. But the 'moral' damages at home and abroad are still greater. The moment chosen for the strike gives to the strike itself the true and proper character of a support to allied imperialism. This is the culminating moment of the negotiations in Paris. This is the moment in which there is the one question—to get finally a peace. Why didn't the postal, the telegraph and telephone operators wait two weeks more, until the return of Nitti from Paris? Was it just 'written'? Was it just 'fatal'? that the *ultimatum* to the Government should fall due on the 13th? All this confirms the sinister political character of the act."

As God pleased, on January 21st the post and telegraph strike was ended, but already there had begun, on the 19th of January, a railway strike. It was a useless strike. The leaders of red syndicalism had been willing to proclaim it at any price, even when it was against both the sentiment and the interest of the workmen themselves. I defined this strike as "an enormous crime against the Nation." The Country was in desolation! Italy was in the claws of disorder and violence; the foreigners left our charming resorts and by-ways; discredit grew general among bankers, while catastrophic rumours swayed over the international world, entangling more and more our diplomatic negotiations.

In the midst of the most unbridled egoism the Fascists held firmly their places during the strikes of the public

services. I will not forget that some groups of our men, inspired by faith, thoroughly did their duty during these agitations. They faced with firm boldness the insults and threats of their striking fellow-countrymen.

Meanwhile, in face of the righteous indignation of public opinion some Socialists began to feel timid. They tried to separate their responsibility from that of the leaders who had proclaimed the strike. On that occasion, in the *Popolo d' Italia* of January 21st, I published an article entitled "Too Late!" I put into the light—with words that later on revealed themselves prophetic—the real situation of Socialism.

"The Turatians," I wrote, and by this word we intend all those who in Filippo Turati, the leader of the Right, recognize their chief, "should have been awakened before. Now the car is thrown upon the steep slope and the reformist's brake is creaking but it does not hold; nay, it exhausts the strength of those who are dragging on the lever. At the bottom there is the impregnable massive wall against which the car will break to pieces. Out of the ruin will come wisdom. This was said also by the French fabulist, La Fontaine;

'À quelque chose malheur est bon:
à mettre un sot à la raison.'

"It would be preferable, nevertheless, that the blockheads might restore their reason without plunging the Nation into destruction and misery."

The railway strike was protracted up to January 29th, and all the time diplomatic discussions were bringing us to disastrous compromises in our foreign policy. About this time into the aridity of the disputes of classes there was thrust an event coloured with highest idealism. It was arranged that the suffering children of Fiume should

be brought to Milan. They had been enduring the hardships of a blockaded town, without economic resources; they were at the mercy of their own distress. Already the children of Vienna, the sons of our enemies, had obtained in Milan kind treatment. Was it not admissible that there should be found love and pity for the Italian infants of Quarnero? The episode of kindness caused by the Fascists with the consent of the Fiume command detonated a large resonance throughout Italy. Great manifestations of joy greeted these children at every junction or way station of their journey. The censors of the Press, however, prevented us from writing of the triumphal journey of these children. It was all part and parcel of a programme to systematically slander our spirit, which always stamped the political handicraft of Nitti, like an ugly hall-mark on a leaden spoon.

This man, in order to justify his vile and inept diplomacy, dared to pronounce in the Chamber a speech on the Fiume question with a friendly intonation toward the Slavians, at the very time that Wilson was pressing his stranger project to create of Fiume and Zara two isolated, detached, aborted, free cities under the control and the authority of the League of Nations!

On the next day, February 8th, my newspaper bore on the first page the following article: "The Abominable Speech of H. E. Cagoia—The Snail." By this surname Gabriele D'Annunzio had stamped F. S. Nitti, and the term had become popular. Following the headline was a short editorial of mine, entitled "Miserable." In it, after having set forth again in a few words the painful history of the negotiations in Paris, I concluded:

"The truth is that Nitti is preparing to go back again. He goes to Paris in order to give his shirt. Before the stubborn Yougoslavian irreconcilableness our Cagoia knows

nothing better than to wail, weep and . . . yield. The whole tone of his speech is vile, dreadfully vile. Not in vanquished Germany, nor in Austria, has there been so vile a minister as Nitti. If there had been one he could not have lasted. This one is the minister of runaways, of autolesionists, he is the minister of Modigliani, the man of peace at any price. By trying to remember continually that the objectives of Italy were Trent and Trieste, Cagoia offers arms to the Yougoslavian resistance. The peace of 1866, in comparison, is a masterpiece with that offered by His Indecency. On his next journey to Paris, Cagoia will make another renunciation. Zara ? Valona ? Who knows ? Quite likely. It is not impossible that he will yield Gorizia too. Perhaps also Monfalcone. And why not the line of Tagliamento ? Maybe only by this price can we hope for the friendship of Yougoslavia ! "

" Before such infamy we feel that it would be preferable to be citizens of the Germany of Noske than subjects of the Italy of Cagoia."

" We have before us days of dolour and shame ; worse than those of Caporetto, worse than those of Abba Carima ! "

" We will recover our strength—but first there is some one who will be forced to pay."

The domestic policies and the foreign policies pursued by the Government of that time did not fail to provoke some stiff discussions among those newspapers that were reflecting the varied tendencies of national life. The *Stampa*, at the head of which was Senator Frassati, who some time later was to be selected as Ambassador in Berlin, was one of my targets. I violently attacked it owing to the programme it adopted. It gave itself airs as if it would be the redeemer of our Fatherland. It is necessary to remember that Senator Frassati had been against the entrance of Italy into the World War. He always stood

aside during the most bleeding and tragic periods of Italian life. Consequently he was the least capable of taking a pose as redeemer of our Fatherland, at the time when peace was to be concluded with the enemies after the victorious end of our War.

*The Corriere della Sera*, representing and interpreting the thought of a great flow of so-called liberal public opinion, was defending arbitration for Fiume and Dalmatia, proposed by Wilson and supported by the prose of Albertini, who followed a pernicious policy inspired by Salvemini and Nitti. *L' Avanti*, the red publication, availed itself of all these polemics and of the slanders against me to libel me in general before the whole of public opinion. And all this campaign, vain and inefficient, was even supported by the Press of the Popular Party, notoriously inspired by the ecclesiastical clubs. But, more important, it was employed against the raising of Fascism and against the War victory.

Strikes were characterized by violent, disgraceful clashes between police and soldiers and the citizens ; the interminable parliamentary discussions were marked by fist fights on the floor of the Chamber. These were pitiful spectacles not only humiliating to citizenship and to government itself, but to the whole fabric of our political life.

In the short cycle of a few months there had been three ministerial crises, but Nitti always came back to power. The question, as always in a democracy gone drunk with compromise of principles, was of mutual concessions, and very heavy ones. Miserable. Useless. Nobody was thinking of the rebuilding of social order in a Nation which had won a bloody war and which had to face the reality that it was living in the presence of a world of moving realities.

Fascism, unique lighthouse in a sea of cowardice, of compromise and of foggy, plum-coloured idealism, had



VITTORIO AND BRUNO, THE TWO ELDER SONS OF THE *DUCE*

engaged itself in battles; it was overpowered by mere blind multitudes. I was the bull's-eye of the target of the Government of Nitti. He unloosed against me all his hounds, while his journalists tired themselves in vain to note down my contradictions in political matters. The Socialists, mindful of my moral and physical strength, covered me with their vengeance and their octracism. At least they roamed at a distance. They were cautious and far off the trail of real things.

During one of the many evenings when Milan was at the mercy of these scoundrels, I found myself surrounded and isolated in a café of Piazza del Duomo, the central hub of the Lombardian metropolis. While I was sipping a drink waiting for Michele Bianchi, a hundred Socialists and loafers hemmed in the café and began hurling a series of abuses and insults. I had been recognized. Perhaps they had in mind, in their collective wrath, to give me a beating in order to place on my person the vengeance they long since had in mind. The crowd, gathering in numbers, became more and more menacing, and so the owner of the café, and female cashier, hastened to pull down the shutters. She invited me, according to the fashion of these disorderly times, to go out because I was endangering their interests. I did not wait for a second invitation. I am used to facing the rabble without fear. The more there are of them the more a man can move toward them with a sure courage which, to some, may appear as an affectation. I cannot say that there was any reluctance on my part to face these cowards. I loc' ›d at the leaders and said, "What do you want of me? To strike me? Well, start. Then be thereafter on guard. For any insult of yours, any blow, you will pay for dearly." I remember the picture of that wolf pack. They were silent. They looked furtively at each other. The nearest withdrew and then suddenly

fear, which is as contagious as courage in any crowd of people, spread among the group. They backed away; they dispersed and only at a distance flung their last insults.

I recite this incident because it was typical of a usual occurrence in the life of a Fascista. But it must be remembered that in other cases the end was quite different—beatings, knife-thrusts, bullets, assassinations, atrocities, torture and death.

In these days there began to develop a contrast between General Diaz, victor of our last campaign, and Nitti.

The London Pact, which had given Italy certain promises, broke down. The Adriatic coast-line was in a state of complete insecurity. Absurd rumours spread in the diplomatic clubs. The danger of seeing the Yougoslavians settled along the whole Adriatic shore had caused a bringing together in Rome the cream of our unhappy regions. Students, professors, workmen, citizens, representative men were entreating the Ministers and the professional politicians. There was an appeal from all the groups representative of the best Italian life in behalf of Dalmatia. All these forces of righteousness, on the occasion of the anniversary of Italy's entry into War, organized a Dalmatian parade with the object to dedicate in the name of the Fatherland their indestructible loyalty to their Country.

Then, in the capital, came about an episode which is still vivid in our memories. It raised a general indignation. The Royal Guards, a new police corps, created exclusively, to serve the designs of the Nittian regime, took by storm the parade. They fired gun-shot volleys. Many victims dropped down and some fifty were wounded. This was the most unworthy episode that ever happened under the sky of Rome in any memory. And, as if this assault and outrage were not sufficient, all the Dalmatians living in Rome were

arrested, including the women. Very few dared to raise their protests. Supine victims and bullying authorities were the fashion. In the Chamber some deputies, among whom were the Nationalist writer, Luigi Siciliani, and Egilberto Martire, moved interpellations which found no echo. From the columns of the *Popolo d' Italia* I spread far and wide my contempt. I threw anathema against the system by which a whole people were disgraced. My cry had some echoes in the Senate, in that Senate where in historic hours always some great name rose up to defend the dignity, the right, and the nobility of the Italian people.

A group of Senators, at the head of whom was the Generalissimo Diaz, presented the following motion:

"The Senate regrets the methods of Government which, by tolerating a want of discipline destructive of the State's power, diminishes the glorious victory of our arms and the admirable resistance of our people. It threatens any co-operative work for the prosperity of the unified Fatherland, and the peaceful attainment of every civil progress. These are methods opposite to Italian tradition, and they have culminated in the violent repression of a patriotic manifestation on May 24th, with the arbitrary arrest of Dalmatians and Fiumeans, guests of Rome."

Among the signatures, with the name of Diaz, were to be seen the names of the Senator Attilio Hortis, a celebrated historian, of Admiral Thaon Di Revel, and of many personalities of high Italian culture. The signers were sixty-four, among whom were the four Vice-Presidents of the Senate.

The motion, more than its hint to awake "Italian tradition," had strength and vigour and disdain for the outrage done to Italian war victory. The leader of that disdain, before all others, was Armando Diaz. The Generalissimo bore about him the glory of Vittorio Veneto. He

saw from day to day that his fine and lofty idealism of soldier and chieftain was fading away.

The Nitti Government—part and parcel of a decadent Party and futile Parliamentary system—the Nitti Government, bearing the stamp of mere pandering for favour and burned with the brand of politicians scrambling for power without regard for the Nation, and without brave idealism, —fell, ingloriously—for the third time!

Giolitti came back.

After so many humiliations and oscillations Parliament and the political system had revealed itself as an assembly wholly unworthy to control or guide the destinies of a people. At the third fall of Nitti, Giolitti, of whom it may be said that he made the Premiership a profession, came back upon the scene. His return gave some of us the impression that he was a kind of receiver in bankruptcy for so-called self-government.

Justice requires our recognition of a great rectitude in the private life of Giolitti; we cannot say as much for his rectitude in his political character. He was a dissolver. He never gave evidence of believing in the deep idealistic springs and streams of Italian life. As a creature of the bureaucracy he placed the whole Italian problem on the vicissitudes of democratic and parliamentary pretence and artificiality. Thus, owing to his temperament, he kept off during the War. Soon after the victory he returned on the political scene like a man who had to wind up a business. That business he was liquidating had been certainly the most bloody, and yet no doubt the most magnificent, and from idealism the most successful of our history as a united people.

The disclosed purposes of the Giolitti Ministry as to domestic policy were good. After the most unhappy Nittian mire public opinion was induced to accept without hostility

new pilots. Foreign agents, provoking elements, supported also by some domestic political compromises, were inciting against us the Albanian population. This noble land which is but twelve hours distant from Bari, and which always absorbed an influx of our civilization; this land in which had gleamed some sparks of modern civil life only on account of the influence we exercised there, all at once revolted against our garrison. We had been at Valona with sanitary missions since 1908, and since 1914 we had military there. We had built there the city, the hospital, the magnificent roads which were a refuge for the Servian Army, routed in 1916. In Albania we had sacrificed millions of lire and devoted thousands of soldiers to maintain her in efficiency and to give this little State a future and a well-ordered existence.

I knew and urged that it was useless to expect any decided Albanian policy from Giolitti. The domestic situation, which continued to remain troubled, deprived him of energy or mind to devote to foreign policy. At that time the Honourable Sforza was Minister for Foreign Affairs; that was quite enough to accomplish the last vandalism in the Adriatic question. Meanwhile our military garrison was obliged to quit Valona owing to the ineptitude of our Government.

We entered another phase of defeatism.

In 1920 there was adopted among the railway employees the systematic practice of preventing the movements of trains carrying soldiers, carabinieri or policemen. Sometimes a similar policy extended also to the clergy. In the face of this inconceivable abuse of power I alone protested. The Italian people were suffering passively from a stupid conception of their opportunities and from blindness which could not see their own power and pride. Those who dared to resist and were critical of the bureau-

cracy or of government policy were persecuted by the Government itself.

There was the incident of the station-master of Cremona, Signor Bergonzoni, which fell within my observation. He, by an act of energy, ordered the railway men subject to his authority to hook on to a train a car conveying some troops to Piacenza. For this episode, exhibiting the most ordinary case of regularity in routine, the Railway Syndicate, domineered by Socialists, demanded of the Ministry of Public Works the dismissal of the station-master Bergonzoni. And because the Ministry by its firmness rejected this demand of the Syndicate, Milan, which had nothing to do with all this matter, had imposed upon it a railway strike lasting thirteen days. Milan, a city of 900,000 inhabitants, choked by an enormous traffic, found itself "incommunicado" from its suburbs and the whole world. It was thrown back on the use of stage-coaches, autos, camions, and was obliged to use even the small boats along the Naviglio River.

Milan, our greatest modern city, was in the power of political anarchy. The same military elements, who would have been able easily to take in their hands the situation and dominate it, were put at the mercy of the local authorities. They were even obliged to ask the authorities for the flour to make bread for the troops! The stations, situated at the boundaries of the district of Milan, had in store heaps on heaps of goods; of course, these stores decayed or deteriorated, and were at the mercy of warehouse and freight-car robbers. At length, after thirteen days, on the morning of June 24th, and after a meeting on behalf of the striking railway employees, during which there was a fusillade of firearms, with dead and wounded, the railwaymen, overpowered by the indignation which had spread over the whole body of citizens, were convinced that it was better to return to work.

But the State's authority was dead, it was now ready for the grave.

The Giolitti Ministry muddled amid plenty of financial difficulties. Giolitti himself hoped to be able to appease the Socialists with the project of general confiscation of all war-profits, and still more with a plan to institute a strong tax on hereditary succession. This latter measure, wholly Socialistic, would annihilate the family conception of a patrimonial line. It would have threatened the rights of an owner to bequeath to his heirs his riches with his name. It had consequences which were not only economic, but also moral and social. Capital as an institution is only in its infancy, the right of its disposal is necessary to foster the function and development of this instrument of ambition, of human welfare and of civilization.

In International policy Count Sforza, Minister of Foreign Affairs, concluded the agreement of Spa, signed the Protocol of Tirana with the renunciation of Valona and Albania, signed the weak Treaty of Sèvres with Turkey, and prepared, by fits and starts, to attempt an end also of the question of Fiume. This last happened at the conclusion of the Treaty of Rapallo.

The application of the Pact of London, by which Dalmatia was assigned to Italy, seemed to have been twisted without a single justifiable reason into something not to be argued. And Senator Scialoia, a gentleman of the old stamp, said, amid the weak voices of the Senate, that the London Treaty "has continually been tricked out of force and effect by those who are themselves Italians."

Believing with all my being that it was necessary to stop the flood of decadence in our foreign policy, I began to use our Fascisti organization and the *Popolo d' Italia.* I tried to raise some dikes. It was difficult to hold back the dirty water. There was a tendency to go toward Communism

whatever the cost. The power of Lenin—I admit it—had assumed the character of a potency only paralleled in mythology. The Russian dictator domineered the masses. He enchanted the masses. He charmed them as if they were hypnotized birdlings. Only some time afterwards the news of the dreadful Russian famine, as well as the information furnished by our mission which had gone to Russia to study Bolshevism, opened the eyes of the crowd to the falsity of the Russian paradise mirage. Enthusiasm ebbed away little by little. Finally, Lenin remained only as a kind of banner and catchword for our political dabblers.

The aviation fields of Italy had been closed, the machines were being dismantled. There had been, however, some attempts to engage in civil aviation. One of the most unhappy and dramatic episodes of that time came out of the sky above Verona. Returning from a trip to Venice, a big aeroplane fell upon the city. The mishap caused the death of sixteen persons, including the pilots. Among the dead there were several journalists from Milan. The tragedy affected all Italy. Mourning was general. But to my horror the authorities seized this opportunity to abandon discussion of aviation, and to dismantle the few machines, motors and wings which were left.

It was just at that period that I wanted to take lessons to become a pilot. The machine which crashed in Verona had been guided by a neighbour of my birthplace, Lieutenant Ridolfi. His body was carried to the churchyard of Forli. I had gone to Forli for rest with some political friends. My reception in my own home district had been cold and even hostile. My effort to be agreeable and my willingness to learn to fly, just after Ridolfi had lost his life, seemed to be quite wasted. Anything in those days that did not have a material value seemed to be superfluous. These were years when men's hearts were grey. For the



THE *DUCE* WITH HIS SEVENTEEN YEAR OLD DAUGHTER, EDDA

same reason the State, for which Gabriele D'Annunzio was preparing a durable form in Fiume, did not catch the imagination of mankind.

But I did not give up. I repeated my flights. I flew over Mantua with the staff of the *Popolo d' Italia.* I was determined to show in action that aviation ought not to disappear from our vision of Italian possibilities, and progress to be found, if necessary, at the cost of hardships. I gave an example personally every time I had the chance and my friends did likewise.

The growing exaltation of the bewitched masses and the incredible weakness of the Government culminated at the beginning of September with the occupation of the factories on the part of the metal workers. The occupation of the factories was to be an example of Bolshevism in action. The doctrine to be illustrated was the taking possession of the means of production. The workmen, with their childish understanding, and much more the chiefs who were betraying them, and well aware of their treachery as they did so, pretended that they were able to administer directly, without an order from anyone planned beforehand, all the workshops, all the processes, and even the sales of output. In truth, though it is not commonly realized, they did nothing else except make some side-arms, such as daggers and swords. They lost not less than twenty-one days in forced leisure and childish manifestations of hatred and impotence.

The occupation once began, the managers, the owners, the employees of the establishments were sequestered by the workmen. The trade marks and factory signs were taken away, while upon the roofs and the doors of the factories the Red banners with the sickle and hammer, symbol of the Soviets, were hoisted with cheers. In every establishment a committee was formed subject to a

Socialist-Communist set of by-laws. Telephones were used to threaten all who were keeping out of the movement and who, as we of the *Popolo d' Italia*, were setting out to war against this grotesque Sovietic parody.

The seizure of the factories was accompanied by the most ferocious acts. At Turin, the old capital of Piedmont, which had such glorious monarchical and military traditions, the Red Court of Justice worked with all its might. Mario Sonzini, a Nationalist and patriot, who among the first had gone over to Fascism, was arrested by the workmen, put under a cruel and grotesque revolutionary trial; he was riddled by bullets and his body then thrown into a ditch. Somebody had a kind Christian thought and threw him into the smelter ovens, but as these were extinguished and as cold as industry itself, somebody else thought to put an end to the poor martyr by beating and kicking out what remained of life. Sonzini's guilt was only that he was a Fascist. The same fate befell others. To this kind of inhuman brutality not even the women were strangers. Apparently a bestial type of cruelty had taken hold of men and women drunk on licentiousness.

The newspaper *L' Avanti*, on that occasion, reported this barbarous murder as follows: "It may happen in life for one to be a Nationalist, to pass to Fascism, to reflect the tendencies of order and to be, nevertheless, arrested and shot to death; this is an average stroke of destiny."

The occupation of the factories in several Italian towns was merely opportunity for violent demonstrations. There were dead at Monfalcone, there were dead in Milan, and there were dead in other towns on the peninsula.

Our credit abroad had been extinguished like a puffed-out candle. Even after the conclusion of peace there was little thought any longer devoted to a rehabilitation of our Nation. One could feel a clear sensation of collapse.

The printing-press began to spew out paper money. It was necessary to increase circulation, it was necessary to have recourse to inflation to prevent our economic life from going into complete ruin. After ten years we are still feeling the burden and the consequences of that inauspicious period.

The exigencies of such artificial finance hastened the wreck. I denounced the peril in a series of articles in a debate with Meda, a member of the Chamber, a man believed to be erudite in public finance. I can say now that nobody in that murky time had the ability to indicate any clear course to the Italian people ; in financial matters we went straight toward utter ruin—and playing an accompaniment on the strings of his foreign policy, Sforzo was continuing his series of renunciations. He arrived at Rapallo, and from that moment Fiume was doomed to become a detached, exiled city lying on a bed of thorns.

November 4th, the celebration of the anniversary of our Victory, gave opportunity for slight symptoms of reawakening. Rome and Milan both had extensive patriotic demonstrations. All Italy celebrated. I did.

But that was transitory. Almost at once there afflicted us those mournful incidents—the tragedy of Palace d' Accursio in Bologna, that of Palace Estense in Ferrare, and the Bloody Christmas in Fiume.

At Bologna there was a bold handful of Fascists led by Arpinati. We were aware that the Socialists were preparing, in the Red city, and through the whole valley, pompous demonstrations to celebrate the installation of the new city government of Bologna, composed for the most part of Reds. On November 21st quantities of Red banners were hoisted on the high towers of the City Hall Palace, as well as on the private buildings. There had been planned also the release of flocks of pigeons to bring the greetings of

the Bologna Socialists to their comrades of other places. The whole town was in the hands of the Socialists. They were on the point of adopting a constitution of the Soviets. The city government minority, composed of elements of good order with Fascists and combatants, was present at the meeting. This was considered by the Reds as a provocation and a challenge.

The Fascists group of Bologna, which had its headquarters in a street called Marsala, organized several squads to defend the public order at any price. In the afternoon the Fascists were being marked out with continuous and increasing insults and provocations. The Fascio—the organization of the Fascisti—by placards made it plain that it was resolved not to be bulldozed, and it warned the women and children to keep at home behind locked doors. It was foreseen that the streets of Bologna might witness a tragedy. This firm attitude of the Bologna Fascists, guided by Arpinati, whipped up the Socialists, not only because they were feeling no longer able to do as they pleased, but also because physical fear had taken possession of their leaders all up and down the line. I say categorically that fear and cowardice have always been typical characteristics of the Socialist Party in Italy.

At the moment when about thirty Fascists formed in tiny squads and tried to go from Indipendenza Street, the open space crowded with the Socialists, there was a general scattering and a disordered shouting and clamour. A portion of the terrified crowd poured over to the City Hall and entered the courtyard. The Socialists, barricaded there as in a fortress, blinded by their own base fears, supposed that all fugitives were Fascists; they feared that the City Hall might be invaded, therefore they threw from above, upon the crowd, hand-bombs with which they had armed themselves.

This increased the general terror in the crowd. Many of the people ran off—tearing up their tickets of the Socialistic organizations.

While around the Palace, and in the courtyard, these events were going on, in the Hall of the City Council there exploded a sudden tragedy. The Red members of the Council, frightened by the apprehension of a Fascist invasion, thronged for the most part toward the exit. Some of them, however, preferred joining the public composed of Red elements, some flung themselves against the little group of the council Conservatives. The first shots were now heard in the Hall. The guards, not to be caught, threw themselves upon the ground. The few minority councillors—among whom were the advocate Giordani, and advocates Oviglio, Biagi, Colliva, Manaresi—kept firm their places, offering a conspicuous mark for wrath whipped up by fear. Somebody fired. The bullet missed Oviglio by a miracle. But a second shot killed the Lieutenant Giordani, bersagliere and mutilate of War, hated for his record by the Reds. Meanwhile the organizers of the bloody riot were continuing to hurl bombs, as if they were gone out of their minds, into the square crowded with people, and they hit fugitive Socialists under the impression that their victims were Fascists. Horrible was the carnage and the butchery.

Something of the same kind happened a little later at Ferrara, on the occasion of a great Socialistic manifestation which was to have taken place in the historic castle of the Estensi. A column of Fascists advancing to the spot of the meeting met a fusillade of lead. The Fascists left on the ground three dead and numbers of wounded. Ferrara the Red; Ferrara which had all municipalities and the province in the hands of the Socialists ; Ferrara which had threatened to arrest its own Prefect passed hours in anxiety. The same exasperated passion of Bologna seized the noble

province of the Estensi. I felt, however, that one could catch a glimpse of tragedies which were mere preludes to certain revolution. What revolution?

I called to Milan the responsible chiefs of the Fascist movement, the elements of the Po Valley, of Upper Italy, of the towns and countrysides. Those present were not many, but they were men resolved to take any risks. I made them understand, as I had suddenly understood, that through newspaper propaganda, or by example, we would never attain any great successes. It was necessary to beat the violent adversary on the battlefield of violence.

As if a revelation had come to me I realized that Italy would be saved by one historic agency—in an imperfect world sometimes inevitable still—righteous force.

Our democracy of yesterday had died; its testament had been read; it had bequeathed us naught but chaos.

# CHAPTER V

## THE GARDEN OF FASCISM

IN some contingencies violence has a deep moral significance.

In our land a leading class was neither present nor living. The Liberal Party had abdicated everything to the Socialists. There was no solid, modern national unity.

Ignorance was still astride of the workmen and peasant masses. It was useless to attempt to blaze a trail by fine words, by sermons from chairs. It was necessary to give timely, genial recognition to chivalrous violence. The only straight road was to beat the violent forces of evil on the very ground they had chosen.

With us were elements who knew what war meant. From them was born the organization of Italian Bundles of Fight. Many also volunteered from our universities; they were students touched by the inspiration of idealism, who quit their studies to run to our call.

We knew that we must win this war too, throw into yesterday the period of cowardice and treachery. It was necessary to make our way by violence, by sacrifice, by blood; it was necessary to establish an order and a discipline wanted by the masses, but impossible to obtain through milk-and-water propaganda and by words, words and more words, and parliamentary and journalistic sham battles.

We began our period of rescue and resurrection. Dead there were—but on the horizon all eyes saw the dawn of Italian rebirth.

The unhappy year of 1921 was closed with the tragic dissolution of the Fiume drama. After the Treaty of Rapallo, by which Fiume was doomed to be a separate body, the Italian resistance in Fiume made itself more decided than ever. D'Annunzio declared that, whatever the cost, he would not abandon the city which had suffered so long and painfully to keep alive and keep pure its Italian soul.

I, too, had been living this drama—day to day. D'Annunzio and I had been close together since the first days of the campaign. Now for more than a year I had been accustomed to receive his brotherly letters. They brought to me the breath of the passion of Fiume. Since the first moment of the occupation of the holocaust city the poet had disclosed to me his firm will to fight. Significant evidence is found in a letter which D'Annunzio had sent me on September 14th, 1919, transmitting to me, for my newspaper, one of his most virile messages. He wrote:

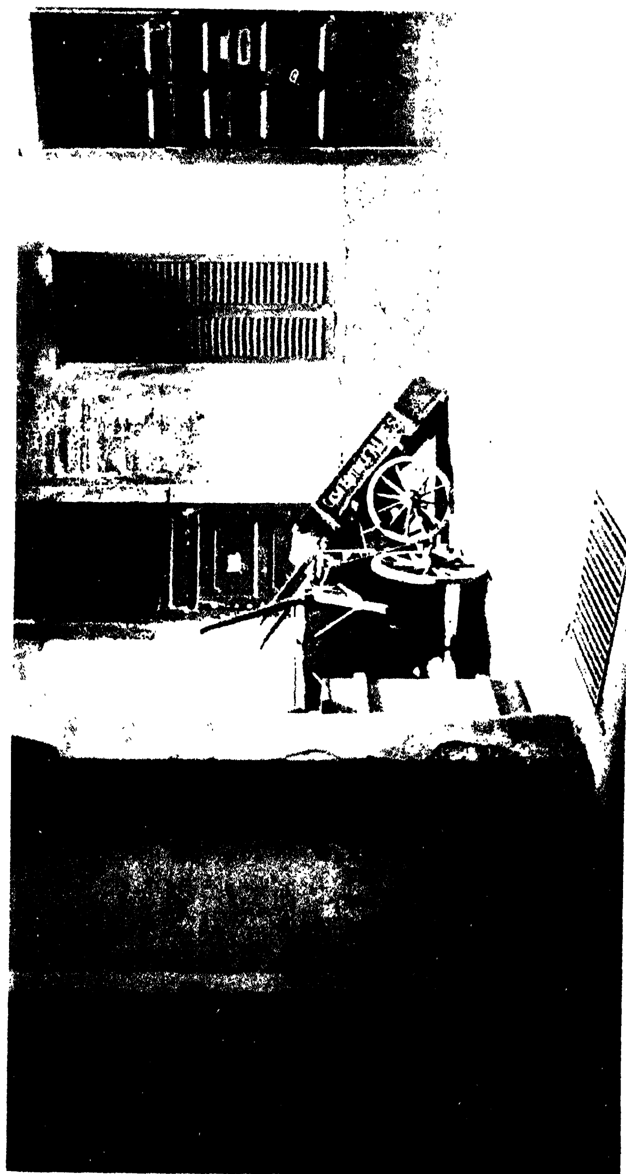
"My dear Mussolini:

"Here are two lines in a hurry. I have been working for hours. My hand and my eyes are aching. I send my son, Gabriellino, brave companion, to bring you this manuscript. Look out for any needed correction and thank you. This is only the first act of a struggle that I will see to the end after my own style. In the case that the censorship should be bold enough to interfere, please publish the letter with the white intervals showing where words are omitted. Then we will see, what we shall see!

"I will write you again. I will come. I admire your constancy, and the strength of your well-directed blows. Let me clasp your hand."

"Yours,

"Gabriel D'Annunzio."



From July to December the situation in Fiume grew more and more difficult. In face of the determined attitude of D'Annunzio, Giolitti, then Premier—to be faithful to the engagements assumed at Rapallo by Count Sforza—resolved to blockade the city. The results of the blockade were dubious, therefore the Government made up its mind to occupy the city by a military expedition. They chose Christmas, because there were two holidays during which newspapers did not appear. Italian soldiers were being hurled against an Italian city, against a handful of audacious *legionnaries*, ardent-souled Italians, the combatants of D'Annunzio Brothers' blood was on the streets. There were even the dead. All of Italy was saturated by deep indignation.

Thereafter, a sense of remorse and conciliation took the upper hand. A formula was found. D'Annunzio gave up his authority to a committee of citizens and left Fiume. It had been held by him during sixteen months with invincible faithfulness. Now it was requisite to entrust its destinies to its best citizens and to the events which were maturing inexorably. I wrote at that time a message which found echo in all Italian hearts:

" Below all the verbosity and the shuttle of mere words the drama is perfect ; horrible, if you choose, but perfect. On one side is the cold ' Reason of State ' determined to the very bottom, on the other the warm ' Reason of the Ideal ' ready to make desperate, supreme sacrifices. Invited to make our choice we, the uneasy and precocious minority, choose calmly the ' reason of the ideal.' "

A few days later, on January 4th, 1921, I commemorated the dead of the Legion of Ronchi by one of the most fervid articles I ever wrote. It ended with the following words:

" They are the latest to fall in the Great War, and it is

not in vain! The Italian tricoloured banner hails them, Italian earth covers them. Their graves are a shrine. There all factions and divisions are obliterated. The dead of Carnaro bear witness that Fiume and Italy are one, the same flesh, the same soul. The opaque ink of the diplomats will never undo what has been sealed by blood for ever.

"Hail, then, to the Ronchi Legion, to the Duce—the leader, D'Annunzio—to his living who return and to his dead who never will.

"They have remained to garrison the snowy mountains —Nevoso!"

The iron necessity of violence already had been confirmed. Everyone of us felt it. Now came the moment to move to action with a clear sense of the definite issue. The formation of squads and battling units that I had drawn up by intuition had been accomplished. I had given them in precise directions well-specified tasks within clean limits. They began their work of discipline and retaliation.

Our violence had to possess impetuosity. It had been trained to be loyal, as were the legions of Garibaldi, and above all chivalrous. The Central Committee of the Italian Bundles of Fight co-ordinated, under my direction, the whole work of the local executives and of the action squads, not only in the provinces but even in the towns. Valiant and vigorous elements joined us from the universities. Italian schools are enriched by the glorious names of students who quitted their halls for political life and Fascism. These eager boys left without regret and without wavering a merry existence, to face mortal dangers during punitive actions against betrayers of our Country. Later on, to these heroes of bold youth I directed the awarding of degree *ad honorem*; they had given their blood freely, so that their Nation might be saved. Among them was the

best type of Italian young manhood, who by disciplined methodical action, full of impetus as were the actors, met and destroyed the Social-Communist spiders which in a web of foolishness and ignorance were exterminating every life-germ of the Italian people. Wherever there popped up a vexation, a ransom, a case of blackmail, an extortion, a disorder, a reprisal—there gathered the Fascist squads of action. The black shirt—symbol of hardihood—was our uniform of War.

The Liberal-Democratic Government quite naturally put difficulties in the way of the Fascist movement. It relied principally on the Royal Guards (Guardia Regia), blind instrument of anti-national hatred. But we, who had sane courage, resource and ability, accepted the fact of facing ambush, traps and death. When instead we were taken to prison, we remained there long periods waiting for trial. I had an effect on my soldiers which seemed to me almost mystical. The boys saw in me the avenger of our wronged Italy. The dying said, "Give us our black shirts for winding-sheets." I could not remain unmoved when I knew that their last thoughts were of "Our native land and the Duce." Love and songs bloomed. A revival of youth filled with Italian boldness, swamped by their virile male beauty the unrestrained rages of irresponsibles; painted out the fear of the Socialists; obliterated the ambiguity of the Liberals. The poesy of battle, the voices of an awakening race were multiplying, in those years of revival, the energies of our Nation.

Our dead were innumerable. Italy's imps, the Red dabblers, our organization of so-called Freemasons who were steeped in political intrigue, already were seeing the danger, menacing to them, of the coming of Fascism. Therefore they used every means to put us down; they created their snares and ambushes more and more carefully and built

their pitfalls more and more cunningly. Every day both the public streets and the open rural fields of Italy were smeared by the blood of frightful conflicts. Sundays, holidays and any occasions of gatherings seemed particularly marked out for attack.

I restrained our own violence within the strict limit of necessity. I enforced that viewpoint with lieutenants and with the rank and file. At times they obeyed me with regret and pain. They were thinking of companions treacherously murdered. But they always submitted to my orders against reprisals. They accepted my authority voluntarily and completely. If I had had a mind to do so I could have commanded pitched battle. The boys would have leaped at the chance; they were looking to me as at a chief whose place could not be substituted and whose word was law.

There were episodes of such a deep attachment to me that I felt lifted up and refined by it. It created in me a profound sense of responsibility. Among these episodes I remember a young man, twenty years old, the Count Nicolo' Foscari, treacherously stabbed to death by a Communist dagger. This fine boy died after two days of agony. With the pain of the wound and at the point of death he wanted to have always near him my photograph. He declared himself glad and proud to die and that from me he knew how to die.

I was calloused to political battles. My inclination, however, has always been against all but chivalrous battles. I understood the sadness of civil strife; but in desperate political crises when the bow happens to be too much bent, the arrow either flies off or the cord breaks. In a few months of action and violence we had to win no less than fifty years lost in empty parliamentary skirmishes, lost in the marshes of little political intrigues, in the wretchedness of an

atmosphere defiled by selfish interest and petty personal ambition, lost in the maze of attempts to treat Government as if it were a jam-pot to attract the flies.

In 1921 I tried a political agreement with the adversaries, under the protection of the Government. The utter incomprehension of the Socialists and Liberals was enormous. My gesture, prodigal and generous, created solely by me, served only to raise new fogs, miasms and equivocations. The truce had been signed by the Socialists, but not the Communists. The latter continued the open struggle, helped in every way by the Socialists themselves. A generous experiment in pacificism had been quite useless ! Socialism had corrupted Italian life. There would be always some unconciliatory antagonists, and so the struggle, after a short parenthesis, was taken up again. It lasted until the extreme consequences, but its renewal was the beginning of the great political battle of 1921.

I will not set forth all the deadly frays of this year. They have gone into the past. But in the houses of my men are burning perennially the votive lamps of the survivors, and on their hearths is the living memory of the fallen. The Fascist legions are of every age and of every condition. Many died when the victory was as yet uncertain, but the God of just men will direct for all the fallen, eternal light, and will reward the soul who lived nobly and wrote in blood the goodness and ardour of their faith.

The first months of 1921 were characterized by an extreme violence in the Po Valley. The Socialists came to the point where they were even willing to shoot at the funeral processions of the Fascists. It happened in Rome. It was at that time that in Leghorn there was held the Congress of the Socialists' Party. A schism developed. It led to the formation of the autonomous Communist Party, which afterward in all the manifestations of Italian political life

took such a loathsome part. I knew, and it was evident to everyone in spite of concealment, that the new Communist Party was inspired and supported and even directed from Moscow. We were invaded just as other lands have since been invaded.

At Trieste, a city dear to every Italian, which had always held alive the flame of faith and enthusiasm, a great Fascist meeting was held. At the head of the Trieste Fascists was Giunta, a member of the Italian Chamber and an ardent and valiant Fascist from the first call to action. He knew, in various circumstances, how to raise formidable barriers against this Slavic inroad, and against the stupidity of the men who had taken authority in Trieste. The gathering was held at the Rossetti Theatre. There I spoke. I set forth our fundamental principles not only for the Fascists, but for all those who were interested in a new and complete Italian policy. After a panoramic examination of the knotty problems which at that time were vexing Italian foreign policy, I demanded a complete definite withdrawal of the Rapallo Treaty by which Sforza and Giolitti had signed away Fiume. I acknowledged, none the less, the impossibility of setting one's self, at that moment, against the tragic consequences of the Treaty, the fruit of a long disintegration followed by those who had led us into a morass.

"The fault of the renunciation," I affirmed, "is not to be attributed entirely to the negotiators at the last hour; the renunciation had been perpetrated already in Parliament, in our journalism, even in a University where a professor has published books—translated, of course, at Zagabria—in order to demonstrate according to his style of thinking that Dalmatia is not Italian!

"The Dalmatian tragedy lies in this ignorance, this bad faith and utter incomprehension. We hope to put a stop

to these grotesque errors by our future work. We will know, love, and defend Italian Dalmatia.

"The Treaty signed, it was possible to make it void by one of the following means: either a foreign war or by insurrection at home. Both are absurd! It is impossible to excite the man in the street against a treaty of peace after five years of bloody calvary. Nobody is able to perform a miracle!

"It was possible to awake in Italy a revolution in favour of the intervention, but on November 1921 it was not possible to think of a revolution in order to annul a peace treaty which, good or bad, has been accepted by ninety out of one hundred of Italians."

Having delineated clearly the uncertain and transitory position in which Italy found herself at that time in respect to the Fiume tragedy and herself, having shown the impossibility of creating a revolution which would have been premature and condemned to failure, I laid down and fixed by firm, precise tacks and nails what should have been the political programme of the Fascists in 1921:

"From these general premises," I said, "it follows that the Italian Bundles of Fight should ask:

"First, that the treaties of peace be re-examined and modified in parts which are revealed as inapplicable, or the application of which can be a source of hatred and incentive to new wars;

"Second, the economic annexation of Fiume to Italy and the guardianship of Italians living in Dalmatian countries;

"Third, the gradual disengagement of Italy from the group of the occidental plutocratic nations by the development of our productive forces at home;

"Fourth, an approach once again toward the nations, Austria, Germany, Bulgaria, Turkey, Hungary, but with

dignified attitude, and maintaining the supreme necessities of our north and south boundaries ;

" Fifth, the creation and intensification of friendly relations with all peoples of the Near and Far East, not excluding those which are ruled by the Soviets.

" Sixth, the indications in colonial policy of the rights and necessities of our Nation ;

" Seventh, the reform and renewal of all our diplomatic representatives abroad by elements from special University training ;

" Eighth, the building up of Italian colonies in the Mediterranean Sea, as well as those beyond the Atlantic, by economic and cultural institutions and rapid communications."

I concluded my speech by an ardent affirmation of faith.

" It is destiny," I said, " that Rome again takes her place as the city who will be the directress of the civilization of all Western Europe. Let us commit the flame of this passion to the coming generations ; let us make out of Italy one of the nations without which it is impossible to conceive the future history of humanity."

The year 1921 was the centenary of Dante. I was dreaming, in the name of Alighieri, " the Italy of to-morrow, both free and rich, all resounding, with seas and skies peopled with her fleets, with the earth everywhere made fruitful by her ploughs."

Later on, in a meeting of Lombardian Fascists, I indicated some landmarks of the Fascist battle. In a speech that I made to my friends in Milan, I affirmed that by its fatiguing work Fascism was preparing men and spirits suitable to the task of an imminent to-morrow : that of ruling the Nation.

Already in germination, through all these affirmations,


BENITO MUSSOLINI
NUOVA STORIA DELLA PATRIA

there was growing the definite intention of preparing by legal action as well as by violence, conquest of power.

The Socialists and Communists, though debating between themselves on doctrinairial questions, vied with each other to show themselves more anti-Fascist than the others. The Communists had no scruples. Every day they gave proof of their contempt for law, and they evidenced a foolish disregard for the strength of their adversaries.

At Florence, during a parade of patriotic character, there had been an attempt at a Communist insurrection. Bombs were thrown, isolated Fascists were pursued. It happened on this occasion that a very young Fascist named Berta was horribly murdered. The unhappy boy, surprised upon a bridge of the Arno River, was beaten to a bloody pulp and thrown from the parapet into the water. As the poor victim, by a dull instinct of self-preservation, clung to the railing bars with his fingers, the Communists rushed upon him and beat his knuckles until our martyr, whose jellied hands were slackening their grip, finally let go and was plunged into the Arno. His body was whirled about in the current.

This single episode of incredible ferocity gave indication of how deeply had penetrated into Italy Communist outrage. As if that were not enough, soon afterward there occurred the butchery of Empoli, where two camions were loaded with marines and carabiniers. The proof of degenerate ferocity of the Communists was evidenced by the corpses of the poor victims, for their inert bodies were treated as jungle savages treat the corpses of their victims.

It was not confined to any one province. At that time there happened also the trap and massacre of Casale Monferrato, where among the dead were two old Sardinian drummers and where there was wounded Cesare Maria de

Vecchi, a brave companion. At Milan, isolated Fascists were singled out and attacked by stealth. One of our most beloved friends, the very young Aldo Sette, was murdered with all the accompaniment of savagery.

But on the 23rd of March occurred the culminating episode of meditated horror and with dreadful consequences. The Communists caused a bomb to explode at the Diana Theatre in that city. It was crowded with peaceful citizens attending an operatic performance. The bomb sent to sudden death twenty persons. Fifty others were mutilated. All Milan gave up to anguish and anger and to chills of vengeance. There was no possibility of stemming public sentiment. Squads of Fascist assaulted for the second time the offices of the newspaper *Avanti*, and it was burned by them. Others tried also to assault the Workers' Chamber, but a strong military garrison barred the Fascists from an attack.

The action squads turned their activity into the suburbs firmly held both by Communists and Socialists. The swift decisive work of the Fascists served to drive from their nests and put to flight the subverters of civil order. The political authority was powerless ; it could not control the disorders and disturbances. On the 26th March I concentrated all the Fascists of Lombardy. They filed off, marching compactly in columns through the principal streets of Milan. It was a demonstration of strength not to be forgotten. At last over the horizon I had brought defenders of civil life, protectors of order and citizenship. There had come a spirit of revival for all good works. The martyrs of Diana and the Fascist victims were the best inspiration. A whole people might now be united in the name of the Roman Littorio, under the direction of Italian youth—a youth which had won the War and now would again attain a serene peace of the spirit and the

rewards of the fruitful virtues of discipline, work and fraternity.

Unforgettable were the demonstrations for the victims of the dastardly bomb at the Diana. From that day on began the progressive crashing down and crumbling of the whole structure of Italian subversive elements. Now these elements were driven like rats to their holes and were barricaded in the few forts of the Workers' Chambers and of the district clubs.

I led a life of intense activity. I managed the *Popolo d' Italia* and every morning I was able to give the political text for the day, not only to Milan, but to the principal cities of Italy where the political life of the Nation found its sources. I led the Fascist Party with a firm hand. I must say that I gave some very strict orders. I had an ear open to all who came to Milan to report as to our organization in the various provinces. I watched the activity of our enemies. I maintained for the Fascists a clear, clean stream of purpose. I maintained the freedom necessary for our elasticity of movements. I wished not to mix or adulterate such a pure and strong faith as the Fascist faith. I wished not to blend that ardent youth which was soul essential of Fascism with old elements of trade and barter, combinations, coalitions, parliamentary compromises and the hypocrises of Italian Liberalism.

Among the many vicissitudes which have accompanied my existence I have always kept an invincible passion for flying. At that period, so tumultuous, so coloured by dramatic hues, every morning found me on a bicycle, going and coming some eighteen miles to take lessons in aviation. My teacher was Giuseppe Radaelli, a modest and brave aviator, full of passion for flight and happy to have the chance to teach me the difficult craft of being a good pilot.

One morning I took a seat in a plane with Radaelli.

The first flight came off without incidents. During the second flight, on the contrary, the motor for some reason stalled, just at the moment when we were executing the manœuvre of coming down. The machine veered sidewise, and after having glided on one wing we were precipitated on to the field from a height of about forty metres. The pilot came off with some slight wounds on the forehead. I had several about the head which would require two weeks to heal. After an emergency treatment at the field, I was treated more thoroughly by Doctor Leonardo Pallieri at the Guardia Medica of Porta Venezia. That incident, which might have had marked consequences to my life was, thanks to the kind treatment by my personal friend, Doctor Ambrogio Binda, passed off as nothing.

However, it gave me the opportunity to measure how many Italians were following my affairs. I received almost a plebiscite of warm sympathy from all over the land. I rested, suffering, for some days and then I took up my usual activity at the *Popolo d' Italia*, knowing that Italy no longer disregarded the part I was to play.

On the same day of the carnage of Diana and of the consequent reprisals while spirits were kindled and irritated, a certain Masi, sent by the Anarchists of Piombino, came to Milan to attempt my life. He presented himself at my house, rang the bell and boldly climbed the stairs. He was a strange creature of extraordinary mien. My daughter, Edda, went to open the door.

The unknown man asked for me. He was sent to the *Popolo d' Italia*, but went below and waited for me on the large public square of Foro Bonaparte. When he saw me he came toward me at first rapidly and then slowly, he wavered. He asked me in a halting voice if I was Professor Mussolini, and when I said "Yes," he added that he wanted to speak to me at some length.

The strange behaviour of the individual with the grim eye made me understand that I found myself in the preŝence of a fool. I said that I did not give audiences in the street. I told him that I received at the *Popolo d' Italia*, where in fact he came half an hour later asking to be introduced to me. I consented at once and willingly. Masi, who I repeat was a young man with burning eyes, as soon as he came into my presence appeared embarrassed. He said he wanted to speak to me. His behaviour was so curious that I asked him to tell me promptly and sympathetically what he wanted to say.

After a moment of hesitation he told me that he had been chosen by lot, in a drawing by the Anarchists of Piombino, to murder me treacherously with a Berretta pistol. Later, having been caught in some doubts, he had resolved to come and confess to me—everything—to hand me the weapon with which he had intended to kill me and to put himself at my mercy. I listened to him, but I said not a word.

Taking the revolver from his hands I called the chief clerk and telephone operator of the newspaper, Sant' Elia, and entrusted to him that unhappy man, so ensnared by anarchy and frightened by the consequences of his dreams. I wanted Sant' Elia to accompany him to Trieste with a letter of introduction to the Fascist Giunta. Soon after, however, the police informed, by what means I know not, of the episode arrested the Anarchist of Piombino as he went away. This was the one clever piece of detective work performed at that time by the Milan police. They utterly failed to trace out the dynamiters of the Diana even after two months had elapsed.

Oh, many had meditated upon my funeral. And yet love is stronger than hatred. I always felt a power over events and over men.

Giolitti in those days was in a most difficult parliamentary situation. On the political horizon there had appeared a constellation of first magnitude ; it was Fascism. Facing this fact the President of the Council of that epoch deemed it opportune to measure the Parties on the basis of parliamentary suffrage, and he announced the elections for the month of May.

After a preliminary discussion the various Parties which were pledged to order, in opposition to Socialist-Communism, found it expedient to go into the elections as a body, which could be defined as a National Bloc.

In the centre of the Bloc—the only motivating and encouraging force—Fascism found itself. All other Parties kept their complexions as subverters in political and economic matters. The Socialist Party presented itself separated from the Communist Party, while the Popular Party, which always had, or claimed, an inspiration of ecclesiastical religious character, moved on the field alone, leaning heavily upon the political influence of the country vicars.

In order to make me acquainted with the real efficiency of our Party, I started reconnoitring in several provinces. I received enthusiastic receptions at the beginning of April in Bologna, a fortress of Socialism, and a barometer indicating the level of the whole Po Valley. Bologna welcomed me in a jubilation of colours with parades, fanfares of welcome and speeches favouring Italian resurrection. The butchery of the Palace of Accursio was still too fresh and red in memories. Fascism was in a hot fervour, therefore my presence could not fail to whip up in all the young men a singular strength of will, hope and faith.

From Bologna I went to Ferrara, another stronghold of Socialism. And there again there was waiting for me an unforgettable demonstration of strength. Both Bologna

and Ferrara are two magnificent towns at centres of regions exclusively agricultural. In those days I could measure by my youth and intimate knowledge the strength, the mentality, the ways of thinking, and the longing for order of the workers of the land. I understood that their mentality had lost its way, but it was not dominated by Red propaganda. At bottom, their mentality is of people wise and praiseworthy, who have always been at the lucky moments the bulwark for the fortunes of the Italian race.

The electoral struggle lasted exactly a month. During that period I made but three speeches; one in Bologna, one in Ferrara and one in Milan on Place Borromeo. Contrary to what happened during the political elections of 1919, I succeeded this time in getting a plurality, not only in Milan, but also in the districts of Bologna and Ferrara. Great demonstrations of joy followed the news. Furthermore, all Fascism in the electoral field was gaining in undoubted strides.

On November 1919 I did not succeed in getting more than 4000 votes. In 1921 I was at the head of the list with 178,000 votes. My election to the Italian Chamber caused a great rejoicing among my friends, my colleagues, my assistants. To all my faithful sub-editors, Giuliani, Gaini, Rocca, Morgagni, etc., I recalled the episode of 1919, when I said to my discouraged and perplexed assistants that within the space of two years I would have my revenge. The prophecy had proved true. A new moral atmosphere was being breathed by every strata of our population. The Fascists though not many entered Parliament, but the few represented in themselves a tremendous force for the new destinies of Italy.

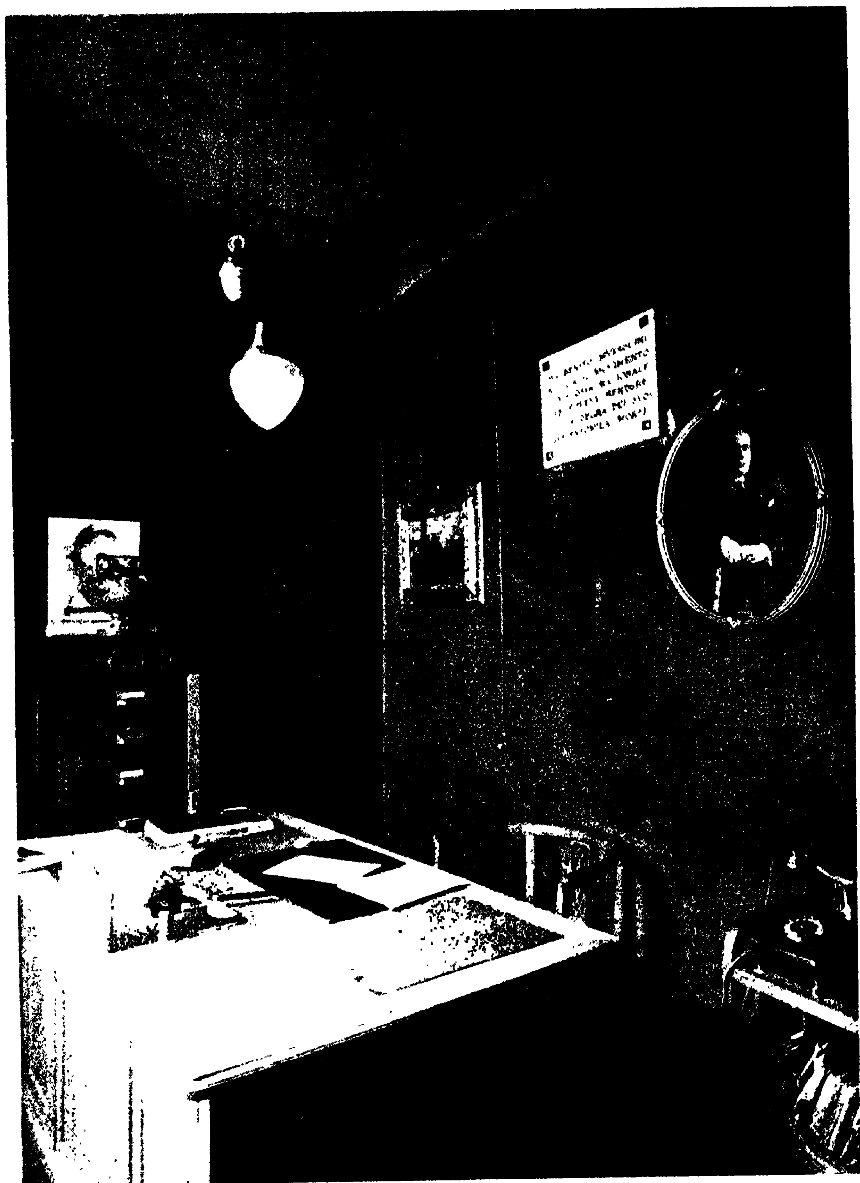
At Montecitorio, the House of Parliament, in order to follow the rules of the Chamber, the Fascists formed their

own group. There were only thirty-five representatives. It was numerically a small group indeed, but it was composed of men with good livers and excellent courage.

In the Socialist group, which was still large, was present one Misiano, a man who had no merits. He had been a deserter in the War, and it was for that reason he was chosen to be elected deputy in the districts both of Turin and Naples! Misiano did not cut much of a figure in the Socialist Party; he had contributed no policy, no element of culture, of will or of sacrifice. He was a plain coward, who for mere bodily fear had left the trenches and passed over to the enemy. He was a deserter whom the Socialists, because of hatred of the War, had been willing to thrust forth for political rewards in peace. This loathsome figure constituted an affront, a shame, an insult to the dead, to the brave survivors of battle, to the wounded, to the mutilated and to orphan boys and girls. No decent Parliament would have been able to tolerate a thing of this extreme vileness. The Fascists were trained to obey only their orders and their consciences. One day they laid hold of Misiano and threw him out of the doors of Parliament. He never should have been allowed in. It was a gesture of strength. Make no mistake—it signified a programme. The air was cleared at Montecitorio; it was easier to breathe there.

During the session I made few speeches. I think I spoke but five times and that was all. Certainly I tried in any case to give my oratory a spirit and to make it stick to realities. Certainly I confined it to a devotion to the interests of Italian life. I put aside parliamentary triflings and the tin-sword play of parliamentary politicians.

In a speech made on the 21st of June, 1912, I criticized without reserve the foreign policy of the Giolitti Ministry. I put on a firm realistic basis the question of Northern Italy,



THE *DUCE*'S OFFICE AT THE *POPOLO D'ITALIA* UP [illegible] FEBRUAR[illegible]
AS IT IS TO-DAY

the Upper Adige. I pointed out the feebleness of the Government and of the men placed in authority over the new Provinces. One of these, Credaro, was "bound also by means of the symbol of the political compass and triangle to the immortal precepts" of false Liberalism, to wit: he was swayed by that masonry which in Italy was representing a "web of foreign and internationalistic ideas." Therefore, I affirmed solemnly, "As the Government of Giolitti is responsible for the miserable Salata and Credaro policy in the Upper Adige, I vote against him. Let us declare to the German deputies here in our Italian present Parliament that we find ourselves at the Brenner Pass now, and that at the Brennero we will remain at any price." I took up again the hot impassioned subject of Fiume and Dalmatia. I assaulted violently the shameful foreign policy of Sforza, leading our Land to humiliation and ruin.

I spoke of our domestic policy. I stripped the covering from the Socialists and Communists and made them face Fascism. I pointed out with irony the fact that among others with the Communists stood Graziadei who, at other times, had been my opponent when he was a Socialist reformist. I exposed to the light the utter lack of principles to be found in representatives who dipped their paws into this or that Party group or programme solely for the purpose of gaining petty power or for personal gain.

The speech, which had only a purpose to clarify, gave some needed hints as to our political action as Fascists in destruction of the methods and principles of our adversaries. To my surprise it created a deep impression. It had a vast echo outside the Chamber, and was undoubtedly among the causes which finally doomed the Giolitti Ministry, like all the rest, to topple over like a drunken buzzard.

I was not alone in a parliamentary struggle. The group

was helping me valiantly and with ability. Already the Deputy Federzoni, since a distinguished official of the Fascist State, had started a review and revision of the whole work of Count Sforza, Giolitti's Minister for Foreign Affairs, and particularly of the Adriatic policy. There had been dramatic sessions in which the work of the aforesaid Minister not only was put under a strict and inexorable examination according to both the logic and conscience of Fascism, but it was examined in the light of the negotiations and treaties, open or secret, which the Parliament had to know and approve of.

After various parliamentary ups and downs the Giolitti Ministry fell and it was followed by that of Bonomi, a Socialist who arrived at being a Democrat by varied captious reasonings. He tried to set up a policy of internal pacification. He was interested in the truce between Fascists and Socialists, of which I have already told the meagre results. Just at the moment when Bonomi was developing this political fabric came the tragic episodes of the massacre of Sarzana. There, not less than eighteen Fascists fell. Then came the butchery of Modena, where the Royal Guards shot into a parade of Fascists, leaving some ten dead and many wounded persons. The domestic policy had not found as yet, one could say mildly, any perch of stability. I constantly was unfolding my active task as leader of the Party, as journalist and politician.

I had a duel of some consequence with Ciccotti Scozzese. He was the long hand of our Italian political masonry. After several assaults the physicians were obliged to stop the encounter, because my opponent had a heart attack. Shortly before that duel I had another with Major Baseggio over some parliamentary squabble.

I think I have some good qualities as a swordsman, and I possess some qualities of courage and, thanks to both, I

always have come out of combat rather well. In those having a chivalrous character I endeavour to acquit myself in a worthy manner.

Finally, in November 1912, I convoked in Rome a large Congress of the Fascists of the whole of Italy. The moment had arrived to emerge from the first phase in which Fascism had had the character of a *movement* outside the usual political divisions, into a new phase where the organic structure of a Party would be made strong, both by firm political entrenchment and by the growth of central and local organization.

The Italian Bundles of Fight had been inspired by impetuous spirit. They possessed, therefore, an organization of battle rather than a true and proper organization of Party. It was now necessary to come to this second phase in order to be ready to be a successor of the old Parties in the command and direction of public affairs. The Congress at the Augusteo—the tomb of Augustus and now a concert hall in Rome,—had to agree on the terms for the creation of the new Party. It had to fix both the organization and the programme.

That was a memorable meeting. Thanks to the number of the followers and the quickness and solidity of the discussions, it showed the virility of Fascism. My point of view won an overwhelming victory in that meeting. The Italian Bundles of Fight were now transforming themselves. They were to receive the new denomination of Fascist National Party with a central directory and supreme council over the provincial organizations, and the lesser Fascist sections which were to be created in every locality. On that opportunity I wanted with all my desire to strip from our Party the personal character which the Fascist movement had assumed because of the stamp of my will. But the more I wished to give the

Party an autonomous organization, and the more I tried, the more I received the conviction from the evidence of the facts—that the Party could not have existed and lived, and could not be triumphant, except under my command, my guidance, my support, and my spurs.

The meeting in Rome gave a deep insight into the fundamental strength of Fascism, but especially to me it was a revelation of my personal strength. But there were several unpleasant incidents. There had been some men killed in Rome. The workers' quarters of Rome was hostile to us. The work of the Congress had, however, its full and normal development, and through the streets of Rome at last filed off the parade of Fascists, in battle array. It served notice to everybody that Fascism was ripe, as a Party, and as an instrumentality with the heart and the means to battle and to defend itself.

The Bonomi Ministry developed its pacification policy in the midst of difficulties of all kinds. The time and the moment were rather murky. The year 1921 presented difficulties which would have made any politician shiver. On the horizon a line of clarification was to be discerned, but the sky was nevertheless still heavy with old clouds.

About the end of this formless grey year, waiting a great dawn, happened an event in the financial world which threw a shadow of sorrow over the whole land. This was the crashing of the Banca Italiana di Sconto. The collapse was felt particularly in the southern part of Italy by the humble classes who had deposited in that bank their savings. This great banking institution had been born during the War, and had done notable services for the organization of our efficiency, but it could not bear in the post-War period the burden of its engagements. This big banking organism in which the labouring populations of the south and of Upper Italy were interested so deeply was

crumpling on itself, giving all the post-War Italian financial policy a sensation of dismay and failure. Ignorance, foolishness, fault, levity? Who knows?

Certainly our credit as a Power and as a rebuilding force, in comparison with foreign countries, diminished enormously. To the faults of our domestic policy was added now, to the eyes of the world, a plutocratic and financial insufficiency.

From the broils of financial chaos, and in the maze of debates which ensued, Fascism kept itself aloof. It delayed, not to consider the past, but chose to determine carefully on a sound, wise and foreseeing monetary policy of the Nation.

For the first time I found myself squarely challenged by the gigantic problem of public finance.

For me it was a new aeroplane. But there was no competent instructor anywhere on our field.

# CHAPTER VI

## TOWARD CONQUEST OF POWER

FINANCE, the proper use and easy flow of capital, and the development of the banking structure of a Nation, must not be underestimated when there is faced the clear responsibility of building a State, or of leading a people out of chaos.

The noisy crash of the great Banca Italiana di Sconto in Italy revealed, as I have said, a deep weakness in our economic structure. After the War it was clear that many banking and industrial enterprises were out of adjustment, and must disappear or be succeeded by stronger institutions.

There were struggles between opposing groups of capitalists. These created a cynical attitude among the modern middle-class; at the same time it was shown that our capitalistic industrial group resented the vice of having no comprehensive plan. We needed a strong capitalistic tradition, rigorous experience; we found that in the whirr of events it was difficult to perceive who was right and who would probably be able to save himself, when the pressure came and a test of strength was made.

The other nations, who saw deeply into this strange cauldron through the cold eyes of their financiers, made dark prophecies as to our economic life. The Italian Government itself did not know how to behave in its money affairs and, not finding anything better, did as is often done in such circumstances—began to print money. That contributed to render the situation, which was already bad and complicated, grotesquely worse.

In January 1922 the Inter-Allied Conference was held at Cannes, in Southern France. It was a very good junket, and it was made more pleasant by the fine hospitality of the French. I went there to serve my newspaper, the *Popolo d' Italia*. What an excellent occasion it was to distract public opinion from our internal crisis, at least temporarily! We could examine thoroughly, instead of domestic thorns, problems of international character!

At Cannes I wanted to interview the great world politicians—responsible men. I would have liked with a full survey to have directed, as a better guide, Italian public opinion as to the various ingredients which we could find in the pudding of our international situation. The Cannes Conference was the overture to the opera of the Conference in Genoa. Italy should have selected her own policy. It should have been one which would not betray vital interests arising from our most indispensable historic and political necessities.

At any rate, because of these considerations, I decided to go to Cannes. I collected ten thousand lire for necessary expenses. My brother Arnaldo went to convert them at a money-changer and brought me the equivalent in French money, which amounted to no more than five thousand two hundred francs. Though I had followed the courses of foreign enchange, this little personal experience made a deep impression. It brought me to an angular fact; the Italian currency had lost nearly half of its value in comparison to French currency! It was a grave symptom. It was a humiliation. It was a blow to the self-respect of a victorious nation, a vexing weather-vane; it showed our progress toward bankruptcy! Up leaped the thought that this situation must be cured by the vital strength of Fascism. It was one of our opportunities; the desperate developments unfortunately had not compelled to action

the Government, or political Parties, or Parliament itself. The monstrosity of inflation instead gave to everybody a fatuous, inconsistent, artificial sense of prosperity.

The Cannes Conference had no importance; it was a preface for Genoa. It was clothed in an atmosphere of indifference. International meetings had followed each other with tiresome regularity here and there in resorts of Europe which appeared as pleasant places to hold meetings. The last reunions had lost interest and were, instead of being important, the object of newspaper satire and of mocking "couplets" in comic reviews. To me, however, the sojourn at Cannes gave means to extract personally from a direct and realistic examination of peoples and events deep and well-rooted conclusions.

The Cannes Conference had provoked a sudden ministerial crisis in France. Briand, whom I interviewed in these days, resigned without waiting for a vote of the Chamber of Deputies. And I, in an article of January 14th, 1922, entitled "After Cannes," having given due weight to the numerous sharp interrogation marks of the international situation, concluded:

"The unsolved problems, questionings and challenges could be ranged in line to infinity. It is urgent, instead, to take note of the most important lesson of the French crisis. It is a bitter verification. It will bring the masses of the populations who suffer morally and economically to say in their hearts, 'These gentlemen are either without conscience, or they are powerless and flabby. They either have no wish to make peace, or they are not able to make it. A Europe in such terrible conditions of spirit and economy as the present frippery, must embark on reason or sink. Europe of to-morrow, broken in divisions of impoverished peoples, may become a colony: two other continents are already high up on the horizon of history!'"




THE PRESENT OFFICES OF *POPOLO D' ITALIA*

To such a plight disclosed by the wide picture of the European horizon, unfolding to my eyes, was to be added our domestic troubles, always growing a little sicker.

I have always spoken as a journalist, as a politician, as a deputy, of the existence of two Italies. One appeared to me freed from servitude. It was noble, proud, loyal, devoutly dedicated by a bloody sacrifice of War, resolved to be always in the first rank to defend the right, the privilege and the great name of the Italian people. On the other side, however, I saw another Italy, dull to any consciousness of nobility and power, indifferent to origin and traditions, serving obscure isms, a slave to apathetic tendencies, cold, egotistic, unable to make a gallantry, dead to sacrifice.

In a thousand hardships, in numerous fights, those two Italies were brought by immutable destiny one against the other; their opposition exploded in bloody forms, typical of the fierce and final struggle between the Fascisti and their enemies. To see in its right light the character of this antithesis, let us examine some of the typical episodes.

In Pistoia, for instance, a brave officer, Lieutenant Federico Florio, who fought valiantly during the War and who had followed D'Annunzio in Fiume, was murdered treacherously by a deserter Anarchist, Cafiero Lucchesi. It was a crime premeditated by a craven to strike down a gallant man. This criminal outrage filled the souls of the Fascisti with complete indignation. The last words of our martyr were simple and solemn, "I am sorry now I will not be able to do something else for my Country." No more. Then the agony came. I felt that such sacrifices cemented indissolubly the unity of Fascism.

"A formidable cement!" I wrote in my paper. "It binds the Fascisti legions; a sacred and intangible bond keeps close the faithful of the Littorio. It is the sacred bond of our dead. They are hundreds. Youths. Mature men.

Not a Party in Italy, nor any movement in recent Italian history can be compared to Fascism. Not one ideal has been like the Fascist—consecrated by the blood of so many young souls.

" If Fascism were not a faith, how did it or could it give stoicism and courage to its legions ? Only a faith, which has reached the heights, only a faith can suggest those words that came out from the lips of Federico Florio, already bloodless and grey. Those words are a document ; they are a testament. They are as simple and as grave as a passage of the Gospel.

" The Fascisti of all Italy must receive and mediate these words—in silence—but unceasingly marching, always more determined—toward the goal ! No obstacle will ever stop them."

All of us had full realization of the command and the impulse which came from the dead. When faith leaps out of the hearts of martyrs it carries irresistibly the sure impression of nobility, and brands men with the symbol of its eternal greatness.

The groups of the Fascisti, their meetings, their compact parades, and their service in patriotism had as ideal leaders our martyrs, invincible knights of the Fascist faith and passion. We called them by name, one by one, with firm and sure voice. At every name, the comrades answered, " Present." This was a simple rite ; it had all the value and the affirmation of a vow.

Quite an opposite symptom of the two contrasting Italies was manifested plainly enough in the politics displayed by the two Senators, Credaro and Salata, who were in border zones, as High Commissioners of the Government. These two men seemed to ask from the natives who were not of Italian blood a kind of mercy and tolerance for the fact that they themselves were Italians. No exaction of

the German-speaking people on the frontier was considered unjustified. Little by little with that policy of cowardice and servitude we renounced our well-defined rights, sanctified by the example and the blood spilled by volunteer heroes. Already in June 1921—as I said in the preceding chapter—without mincing words I had denounced and ridiculed, in the presence of all the Chamber of Parliament, the work done by Credaro and Salata. Their destructive, eroding work, however, continued. The Fascisti, confronted by successive proofs of such innate and inane weakness, were roused; they accused the two Governors with words violent enough. On January 17th, 1922, at the meeting held in Trieste, the Fascisti demanded the recall of Salata and the suppression of the central office for the New Provinces. That campaign succeeded in making its own way some time afterward. In fact, the two Senators, Credaro and Salata, were recalled even though they were replaced by the Government. But the consequences of their errors were to be suffered for a weary time. The black shirts would have garrisoned quite differently, and with pride and dignity, the sacred limits of the Brenner and the Nevoso.

In that period of bitter charges, counter-charges, debates and squabbles, while the European horizon was still filled with thunderstorms, came the death of the Pontiff Benedict XV, Giacomo della Chiesa, of a noble family of Genoa. He passed away January 22nd, 1922. He had ruled the Church in the most stormy period of the War, following Pius X, the kind-hearted patriarch of Venice, who distinguished his pontificate by a strong battle against the fads of political and religious modernism.

Benedict XV did not leave in our souls a sympathetic memory. We could not, if we tried, forget that in 1917, while people were struggling, when we had already seen the

fall of Czarism and the Russian revolution with the defection of the armies on the eastern front, the Pontiff defined the War with an unhappy expression, "a useless massacre." That affirmation, inconceivable in such a terrible moment, was a blow to those who had faith in sacrifice for an ideal and who hoped the War would correct many deep-rooted historical injustices. Besides, War had been our invention; the Catholic Church had ever been a stranger to wars when it did not provoke them herself. In spite of all, the ambiguous conduct of the Pope amid the fighting nations is considered nowadays by some zealous persons, who are insolvent in critical sense and blind to historical consciousness, as the maximum of equity and the essence of an objective spirit.

But that attitude and its expression had, for us Italians, a very different value. It served to make evident an anomalous phase of Italy's situation—that is, the position of the Pontiff in Rome during a period in which Italy was engaged in a terrible struggle. For that reason, on the death of Benedict XV, the succession to the pontificate acquired, at that moment, a particular importance for the future.

There is a saying in our country which is applied to the most extraordinary events to demonstrate that the most complex things can be reduced to very simple terms. The expression is, " When a Pope is dead, another one is made." There is no comment to make as to that simple affirmation. However, to succeed to the throne of St. Peter, to become the worthy substitute of the Prince of the Apostles, to represent on earth the Divinity of Christ, is not quite the same as the weight and value of a conclusion reached by an elective assembly. With the relationship that existed between the State and the Church in Italy one can easily understand how there could be reasons of apprehension, besides serious interest in the results of the Conclave. The

eyes of all the Catholic world were turned towards Rome. Great vexations stirred all the European chanceries; secret influences were penetrating deep places; they tried to suppress and overpower each other.

Spectators and diplomats of every country in the world were spellbound by the complexities at the very moment that preparations for the Conclave were being made, and all Rome was getting ready for the patient waiting in the Plaza of St. Peter's during the balloting.

Meanwhile, in Italy there arose a debate on the political effects of Benedict XV. Various prophecies were made as to his successor; the journalistic row that went on was never surpassed. Many problems of vast consequences were treated with hot and cold superficiality.

However, the fall of the Bonomi Ministry, attributed to inefficiency in domestic politics and to the fall of the Banca Italiana di Sconto, was really due to the failure of a commemoration for Pope Benedict XV by the National Parliament.

I had already on various occasions disclosed to the Fascisti, who I considered and consider always the aristocracy of Italy, that our religious ideal had in itself moral attributes of first importance. I had affirmed the necessity to condemn the unfruitful conception, absurd and artificial, of affected or vicious anti-clericalism. That tendency not only kept us in a moral situation of inferiority compared with other peoples, but also divided the Italians on the religious field into various schools of thought. Above all it submitted us to such corrupting, sinister and tortuous power as that of international masonry of a political type, as distinguished from the masonry known in the Anglo-Saxon countries.

I had wanted to show how the problem of the relations between the State and the Church in Italy was not to be

considered insoluble, and to explain how necessary it was to create after a calm and impartial objective examination an atmosphere of understanding, able to give to the Italian people a source of life and harmony between religious faith and civil life.

The Fascisti, as intelligent people worthy of the epoch in which they were living, followed me in the new conception about religious policy. To it was attached our war against masonry as we knew masonry in Italy. It was a war of fundamental importance, and Fascism was almost unanimous in a determination to fight it to the end.

Let us not forget that the masons of Italy have always represented a distortion, not only in political life, but in spiritual concepts. All the strength of masonry was directed against the papal policies, but this struggle represented no real and profound ideal. The secret society from a practical point of view rested on an association of mutual adulation, of reciprocal aid, of pernicious nepotism and favouritism. To become powerful and to consummate its underhand dealings, masonry made use of the weaknesses of the Liberal Governments that succeeded each other in Italy after 1870 to extend its machinations in the bureaucracy, in the magistracy, in the field of education, and also in the Army, so that it could dominate the vital ganglions of the whole Nation. Its secret character throughout the 20th century, its mysterious meetings, abhorrent to our beautiful communities with their sunlight and their love of truth, gave to the sect the character of corruption, a crooked concept of life, without programme, without soul, without moral value.

My antipathy for that disgusting form of secret association goes back to my youth. Long before, at the Socialist Congress of Ancona in 1914, I had presented to my comrades the dilemma : Socialists or masons ? That point of view

had obtained a complete triumph in spite of the strong opposition of the mason-Socialists.

Later, in Fascism, I made the same gesture of strength. It took courage. I obeyed the categoric command of my conscience, and not any opportunism. My attitude had nothing in common with the anti-masonic spirit of the Jesuits. They acted for reason of defence. They, after all, are almost completely unknown in their organic structure as a religious caste.

For my linear, methodical and coherent course of policy, the hate of the masonic sect persecutes me even now. Masonry of that type has been beaten in Italy, but it operates and conspires behind the mask of international anti-Fascism. It utterly fails to defeat me. It tries to throw mud at me, but the insult does not reach its mark. It machinates plots and crimes, but the hired assassins do not control my destiny. It goes gossiping about my weaknesses, and the supposed organic afflictions of my body, but I am more alive and stronger than ever.

This is a war without quarter, of which I am a veteran. Every time that I have wanted to cauterize difficult situations in the Italian political life, every time that I have wanted to give a sincere, frank and loyal moral rectitude to the personnel in politics, I have always had against me, our masonry! That organization, however, which in other times was very powerful, has been beaten by me. Against me it did not and cannot win. Italians won this battle for me. They found the cure for this leprosy.

To-day in Italy we breathe the open air; life is exposed to the light of day.

When Bonomi fell, the King consulted with many minds. I too was called twice to the Quirinal, his official palace where conferences are held. Obvious reasons of

reserve forbid me to make known what I said to the Sovereign. This political crisis took on abnormal aspects. We groped in the dark. The number of men in the political field who were fit to fill a minority was quite restricted. They looked toward Orlando, then toward De Nicola, but nobody wanted to accept the responsibility of forming a Ministry under the prevailing conditions. They were obliged to go back to Bonomi, who fell for the second time on the *via crucis* when he presented himself again at the Chamber.

New consultations and new suggestions were made. Always the same names were given; Orlando, De Nicola, Bonomi. The picture presented was of the same helplessness which has afflicted so many democracies and has made many countries able to vie with each other in the humiliating and derisive boast that they have had more Governments and Ministries than years of existence! The same requirements were asked of leadership—to be able to compromise principles and sometimes even integrity, to barter and negotiate with palavering artistry and to seek at least the making of a new shaky structure which would perpetuate the whole depressing system. This system might appear dear to the heart of doctrinaires. It was quite another affair in practice.

The "Popular" or "Catholic" Party, following its bad political instinct which caused it to be ultra-Conservative under cover and revolutionary in the street and in Parliament, vetoed any return of Giolitti. The posture of the *popolari* was quite unique. Unfortunately they controlled a strong group in the Chamber. While they refused to accept the responsibility of power, they blue-pencilled Giolitti, denied support to Bonomi. They rendered the composition of any Ministry wellnigh impossible even as a makeshift.



In spite of consultations the same names always came to the surface. It was a stagnation which comes finally to weak democracies. It was tearing to pieces political logic, common sense, and, unfortunately, also Italy herself.

At last there was formed the Facta Ministry. This mediocre selection of a Member of Parliament, closely bound to Giolitti, was made as the only anchor of safety in an absurd extravaganza. Every day we went down one step on the stairs of dignity. Nevertheless, under these conditions, and because Facta undertook a burden that nobody else wanted, I did not hesitate to declare in my paper that the new Cabinet, colourless as it was, might function for something or other. I was prepared to say that it could represent, if nothing else, a will to go on—at least in the affairs of ordinary routine administration. It is bad enough to suffer a Government which creates nothing; it is even worse to suffer a system of politics which cannot even create an administration of itself!

Facta was an old veteran of Parliament, and I feel sure he was a gentleman stamped out by the old die. Respectful toward the third-rate political morals of the men of his age, he has had only one devotion. That was for his teacher, Giolitti. Facta had been a discreet Minister of the Treasury in other times. He had not, as even his friends said, the strength and authority needed to draw up a Ministry in a serious moment. He had to face the gas and smoke of the struggle between Parties, of the pretensions of the *popolari*, of the growing strength of Fascism, and, finally, a delicate international situation abroad.

It was in just such ways that the old "Liberal" Italy, with its petty dealing with problems, its little parliamentary pea-shooting, its unworthy plots in corridor and cloakrooms, ante-rooms and sidewalk cafés, for puny personal power, its recurring crisis, its journalistic blitherings, was breaking

Italy. Italy, with its struggling co-operatives, its inadequate rural banks, its mean and superficial measures of economy, its incapable and improvident charity. Italy, with its position of humble servant, with a napkin on arm to wipe others' mouths at international conferences. Italy, prolific and powerful. Italy, like a mother able to supply, even for foreign ingratitude, laborious sons able to make fruitful other soils, other climates, other cities and other peoples! Such was her leadership; such was her plight!

Facta was the man who fully represented that old world. Facta was the first to be surprised that he had found suddenly so many admirers. He often said that he failed to understand why he should be at the head of the Italian Government. This timid Member of Parliament forgot that all these people around him, who gave him by their mouthings a sensation of strength and influence, were only the survivors of an old Liberal democratic world, incapable of living, out-dated, clinging, shipwrecked, to the last Liberal planks of compromising for safety.

But the powerful machine of Fascismo was already in motion. Nobody could step into its path to stop it, for it had one aim, it was to give a Government to Italy.

In these days there were some attempts at Fascist secession and schism. I removed them with a few strokes of a pen and a few measures taken within. I was troubled less by mistaken disaffections than by a single grave incident in Fiume. There a renegade Italian, Zanella, nursed and nourished an ignoble anti-Italian plot. The Fascisti imposed banishment upon him. This evil representative of the autonomists and of the Jugoslavs was obliged to leave the unhappy city which without Italy would never have been able to put its lips to the cup of peace.

At this time Charles of Hapsburg died, after having tried vainly twice to seize again the crown of Saint Stephen.

The Nemesis of history completed its work and took away from the Hapsburg line the last possibility of coming back. In Italian history this reigning house had represented always a most unfortunate influence. It had been eternally adverse to our solidarity.

Without attracting deep attention or intelligent public interest, living this way and that, up and down by alternate hopes and crises, optimisms and weary despair—came the Conference of Genoa.

On the first of that May was celebrated the so-called Festival of Labour. The only distinctions given this festival were unfortunately an increased outburst of Socialist and Communist attacks and ambushes. Even the anniversary of the declaration of War, May 24th, was saddened by blood. Solemn celebrations were held throughout Italy, but in Rome the Communists dared to fire at the parade which was doing honour to Enrico Toti, the Roman who, besides his life, had hurled against the fugitive enemy also his crutches. One person fell dead and there were twenty-four wounded.

As if that was not enough the Alliance of Labour, a hybrid coalition of all the anti-Fascist groups, proclaimed a general strike.

It was too much! There was no sign of any act of energy from the Government. Without hesitation I ordered a general mobilization of the Fascisti. I affirmed on my word of honour that we would break the back of the attempt of the Red rabble. "We are sure to smash, *we may crush*, this bad beast once for all."

Considering the timid behaviour of the middle classes and of the Government, only this virile decision, taken with full analysis, full determination, and full responsibility, served as a cold douche for the Socialists and the Reds. The Fascist mobilization came like lightning.

On the same day the strike ended.

While the public streets, squares and fields were put in order by the energetic intervention of the Fascisti, in the Parliament at Montecitorio the usual intrigues went on. There was an oscillation of plans and programmes. These ranged from proposals of a dictatorship to collaboration with the Reds! In the general marasmus there came, on July 12th, a statement from the Minister of the Treasury, Peano, which marked for me the maximum of our anxiety.

*The budget of the Nation had a deficit of six miliards and a half.* It was a terrific figure for Italy. It was a situation impossible for our economic structure to bear. To errors in foreign and domestic policy was added financial chaos. Minister Facta, in record-breaking speed, had demonstrated in every way his incapacity. I made in Parliament, July 19th, 1922, a speech in which I specifically and flatly withdrew from the Ministry the votes of the Fascist group. After having demonstrated the equivocal position of the Socialists, who wanted to collaborate with the Government so that they might blackmail it better, and of the *popolari*, who wrongly considered themselves supreme rulers of the situation, I said these clear and sharp words to the Premier himself:

"Honourable Facta, I tell you that your Ministry cannot live, because it is unbecoming from every point of view. Your Ministry cannot live, I might better say vegetate, or drag its life along, thanks to the charity of all those who sustain you. The traditional rope in the same manner sustains the not less traditional hanged. After all, your makers are there to testify to the character of your Ministry; you have been the first to be surprised into the Presidency of the Council."

I went on then to examine the disheartening mistakes of the Facta policies, and I concluded by asserting that

Fascism, by getting away from the parliamentary majority, had accomplished a " gesture of high political and moral modesty." " It is impossible to be part of the majority," I added, " and at the same time act outside as Fascism is now forced to act."

These words excited a brisk stir of mumbles, exclamations and comments, which went to a higher pitch when I added :

" Fascism will make its own decisions. Probably it will soon say if it wants to become a legitimate Party, for that means a Government Party, or if it will instead be a Party of an insurrection. In the latter case it will not be able any more to be part of any governmental majority. Consequently it will not be obliged to sit in this Chamber."

I gave in that way, not only to the dying Facta Ministry, but also to any other new Government, an energetic and unmistakable warning. I had put up the signboard of my intentions and declared in the open where I stood.

On that day the Facta Ministry fell. And immediately they began to grope in the dark again, trying to find a successor. Orlando, Bonomi, Facta, Giolitti. Again these were the names mouthed about.

By process of deductions and exclusions, the name finally hit upon was Meda. He was the Popular Party deputy from Milan, and the chief of the *popolari* deputies who kept under their power any Ministry with their secret, sinister tactics. Meda, who had already been a Minister, made his gesture of refusal and renunciation, because of fear. That was our paradox—nobody in Italy, amid this so-called strength of the constituted order, which included priests and Radicals, wanted or was able to assume responsibility of power. Whatever " Liberalism " and " democracy " had claimed for power, at least now, nobody would touch the treasure.

The Socialists in this situation cheerfully blackmailed

the nation, while the Fascisti were silently preparing the yeast and the bread, the will and the weapons for an insurrection of national dignity.

While the conferences to find ways out of the crisis went on slowly, at the moment of inability to constitute a Government, there came about in Italy an almost inconceivable situation. All the strength of the Left Party, not only those openly subversive, but also the organization of the Labour Confederation, the Socialist Parliamentary group, the Democratic groups, and the Republicans staged a general strike all over Italy. Its character was typically and solely anti-Fascist. Its pretence was to save the liberty of the people, threatened by Fascism!

This galaxy of political elements, more despicable than riff-raff, these inert, wasteful, hopeless forces which in the past had massacred every liberty and trampled in every way open to the imagination our morals, our peace, our efficiency, and our order, could not have done a more illogical, a more unjust, a more offensive and provocative act toward Fascism and the Italian people.

These days marked by these sinister forces were days in which I made irrevocable decisions. Our development began by degrees of a political and a military reserve strength, which was to bring us in the end to the March on Rome and the conquest of power.

As an answer to the anti-Fascist provocation, I ordered another general mobilization of the Fascisti. The Council of the "Fasci Italiani di Combattimento" was ordered to sit permanently. The Fascist technicians were to be brought together to continue the work in the public services. The *squadristi* were to disperse subversive organizations. The Fascisti of Milan assaulted the *Avanti*, which was considered the lair of our opponents. They burned the offices. They occupied the street-car barns. They began

to make the public services active in spite of the declared strike.

To crush a strike, the Government was powerless, but a new strength had beeen substituted for the Government! The Fascisti, well armed, occupied the electric stations to prevent acts of sabotage. It was necessary to destroy for ever all the nerve centres of disorder. The Fascisti did it.

In Milan alone three young black shirts lost their lives. Of these, two were University students. We had many wounded boys.

The trial of strength, however, was successful. The enemies of Italy were taken with convulsions. They tossed responsibilities back and forth in foolish oratorical and literary battles. The life of the people had come back to normal rhythm. Fascism had revealed a strength capacious and able to dominate our Italy of to-morrow, not only in the sense of mere force, but in determination, fundamental wisdom, character and unselfish patriotism.

Our antagonists were defeated, confused and humiliated. One of those who called themselves interpreters of the literal idea recognized—how generous!—that Fascism was now a power which could not be neglected. The *Corriere della Sera,* the serious and in some ways admirable Milan newspaper—which had always used its circulation to become the speaking-trumpet for the spirit of moribund middle-classed mediocrity—had given in the past a sort of halo to Filippo Turati, the Socialist leader. Now it felt that it was necessary to give a bit of space to recognize the right of Fascism to participation in the Government. The unsettled crisis went lumbering along. I was again called by the King. I had some interviews with Orlando. One after the other all the prospected combinations fell apart and were put aside like old rejected castings. So,

wearily, they came back to Facta. He sent one of his emissaries to me and asked me under what conditions the Fascisti would accept places in the new Government. I sent back word by the messenger that Fascism would ask for the most important offices.

I was urged to take a position in the Cabinet, but how absurd! Naturally I had to stay out of the coalition so that I could maintain my freedom to criticize and, if need be, to take action. My claims, however, for Fascist representation were judged immoderate. The ill-starred Facta Ministry was launched without us, but as the ship took the water it was greeted solely by a nation which muttered its contempt and its indifference.

Friends and enemies both looked only toward Fascism. It was the one element that sparked interest in the life of the Italian people.

I had made up my mind to lead the Black Shirts myself. I already had crystallized my determination to march on Rome.

The situation admitted no other solution.

I called to Milan on October 16th a general who had specialized fitness and was saturated by real Fascist faith. I made a scheme of military and political organization on the model of the old Roman legions. The Fascisti were divided by me into *principi* and *triari*. We created, after conferring with the high leaders, a slogan, a uniform, and a watchword. I knew perfectly the Fascist and anti-Fascist situation in every region of Italy. I could march on Rome along the Tyrrhenian Sea, deviating toward Umbria. From the south the compact formations of Puglie and Naples could join me. The only obstacle was a hostile zone which centred in Ancona. I called Arpinati and other lieutenants of Fascism and ordered them to free Ancona from Social-Communist domination. The town, which was



known to be in the hands of the Anarchists, was conquered by manœuvres carried out in perfect military fashion. There were some dead and wounded. Too bad! But now the remnants of the anti-Fascist forces were destroyed. Anti-Fascism was now concentrated in Rome, it was driven back to its barrack, on Montecitorio where Parliament sat!

A new sunshine broke over the multitudes of our provinces. We could all breathe with full lungs. The brave effort of Fascism was now rising with the flood tide of its full efficiency. Critics of reputation, historians of wide-world fame, studious people from every part of the earth were beginning to regard with quickening interest the movement I had created and dominated, and was leading toward Victory.

While I was penning some editorials against representatives of the sceptics, I wrote: "Fascism is to-day in the first stage of its life: the one of Christ. Don't be in a hurry: the one of Saint Paul will come."

I was preparing then every minute the details of the conquest of Rome and of power. I was certainly not moved by any mirage of personal power, nor by any other allurement, nor by a desire for egotistical political domination.

I have always had a vision of life which was altruistic. I have groped in the dark of theories, but I groped not to relieve myself, but to bring something to others. I have fought, but not for my advantage, indirect or immediate. I have aimed for the supreme advantage of my Nation. I wanted finally that Fascism should rule Italy for her glory and her good fortune.

I cannot, for obvious reasons, discuss all the measures, even some of the most simple, that I took in this period. Some are of political and secret character about which my

reserve is absolutely necessary. The *Popolo d' Italia*, my paper, without attracting too much attention from outsiders and my enemies, had become the headquarters of the spiritual and material preparation for the March on Rome. It was the hub of our thought and action. The military and the political forces both obeyed my command. I weighed all the plans and proposals. Having made my own at last, I gave the necessary orders. Then there began extensive preparatory manœuvres, such as the occupation of Trento, of Ancona and of Bolzano—places which might threaten our strategy.

I wanted to inform myself about the state of mind of the Fascisti ; about their efficiency and their determination. Accordingly I went to make four important speeches in different parts of Italy. In those speeches I set forth the policies of to-morrow. I defined the ultimate goal of Fascism ; it was candidly stated. It was the conquest of power. I didn't want to ingratiate myself with the masses. I have always spoken with naked candour and even with brutality to the multitudes. That is a distinct contrast to the contemptible courtship made for their favour by the political Parties of every time and every land.

On September 17th, 1922, for instance, one month before the march on Rome, I wrote that it was necessary to " throw down, from the altars erected by the ' Demos,' His Holiness *the Mass !* "

Fascisti meetings which I attended were held in Udine, in Northern Italy, in Cremona, in the Valley of the Po, in industrial Milan and in Naples, the centre of Southern Italy. I wanted to be personally acquainted with the spirit of those districts, each with a nobility of its own. I was acclaimed as a conqueror and a saviour. This flattered me, but be sure that it did not make me proud. I felt stronger, and yet realized the more that I faced mountains of

responsibility. In those four cities, so different and far one from the other, I saw the same light! I had with me —the honest, the good, the pure, the sincere soul of the Italian people!

I assembled the Central Committee of the Fasci Italiani di Combattimento—the Bundles of Fight—and we came to an accord on the outlines of the movement, which was to lead the Black Shirts triumphantly along the sacred roads to Rome.

Speaking in those days at the Circolo Sciesa of Milan, I said to my trusted men that we finally had come to the "sad sunset of Liberalism, and to the Fascist—dawn of a new Italy."

## CHAPTER VII

### THUS WE TOOK ROME

AND now we were on the eve of the historic march on the Eternal City.

Having completed my survey and estimate of the condition in the provinces; having listened to the reports of the various chiefs of the Black Shirts; having selected the plans of action and determined in a general way upon the most favourable moment, I called together in Florence the chiefs of the Fascist movement and of the squads of action. There were Michele Bianchi, De Bono, Italo Balbo, Giuriati, and various others. Someone at the quiet conference suggested the mobilization of the Black Shirts for November 4th, the anniversary of the Victory. I rejected that proposal, for it would have spoiled a day of commemoration by introducing the element of revolutionary activity.

It was necessary to give our movement the full advantage of opportunity and to make it sparkle and detonate. It was necessary to weigh, besides the military aspect, the political effects and values. We had to consider, finally, the painful possiblity of a violent suppression, or a failure spreading from some slip to all of our plans. We were obliged to determine beforehand all the hows and whens, the details of the means, with what men and with what aims the Fascist assault could most wisely be launched.

The Fascist meeting in Naples, which was advertised as our second great Congress, with its display of discipline and of speech-making, served to hide the beginnings of

the real mobilization. At a fixed moment the squads of action of all Italy were to be at arms. They would have to occupy the vital nerve-centres—the cities, and the post offices, the prefectures, police headquarters, railroad stations, and military barracks.

Detachments of Fascisti were to march along the Tyrrhenian Sea, toward Rome, led by chiefs, all of them brave former officers. The same movement was to take place on the Adriatic side, from which direction were to be launched on Rome the strength of the low Romagna, Marche and Abruzzi districts. That plan required that we should free Ancona from the Social-Communist dominion. This had been done. From middle Italy the squadrons already mobilized for the meeting at Naples were also to be directed upon Rome. They were supported by groups of Fascist cavalry under the command of Caradonna.

The moment the Fascist mobilization and campaign was decided and actually began operation, the martial law, the stern rules and orders of Fascism, both for officers and privates, were to be enforced.

The political powers of our " National Directorate " were turned over to a military quadriumvirate of action in the persons of Generals De Bono, De Vecchi, Italo Balbo and Michele Bianchi. I presided over the quadriumvirate and I was the Duce (the leader) and had the ultimate responsibility for the work of the four men—a responsibility for which I was fully pledged, not only to the Fascist, but to Italy.

We selected as general concentration headquarters the town of Perugia, capital of Umbria, where many roads flow to a centre and from which it is easy to reach Rome. In case of military and political failure, we could, by crossing the Apennine range, retire to the Valley of the Po. That zone in any revolutionary movement of history has

always been properly considered the keystone of any situation. There our domination was absolute and undisputed. We selected the watchword; we fixed the details of the action. Everything had to be reported to me—in the offices of the *Popolo d' Italia.* Trusted Fascist messengers wove webs like scurrying spiders. All day long I was issuing the necessary orders. I wrote the proclamation which was to be addressed to the Country on the eve of action. We knew from very faithful, unforgettable friends that the army, unless exceptional circumstances arose, would maintain itself on a ground of amiable neutrality.

At the historic Congress at Naples, after my opening speech, which traced the outlines of the Fascist action in the State, and assigning to Naples the title Queen of the Mediterranean, the general discussion continued in academic tune, without a definite aim, except that of gaining time. The leader in that dissembling and sham discussion was Michele Bianchi, one of the quadriumvires for the march on Rome. At that time he had revealed already a notable political mind. De Bono and Balbo, who had great authority over the squadrons of action, joined the general headquarters in Perugia.

I went from the adjourned Congress back to Milan. During the trip I had opportunity to see many friends and to build additional preparations. I had important conversations on that particular drive which had to be organized in Milan, as in other centres of the Lombardy district. In order not to arouse the suspicion of the police, for I was always surrounded by spies, I assumed the attitude of an indifferent person without a worry or trouble in the world. This was somewhat difficult, for I had to spend precious time in trying the speed of a new car, and in other workaday comings and goings. In the evenings I went to the theatres.

I pretended to have a great spirit of activity in my editorial writing and newspaper management.

But suddenly, when I knew that everything was ready, I addressed from Milan, through the *Popolo d' Italia*, and by means of independent publications and through the correspondents of all the Italian newspapers, my proclamation of revolution. It had been signed by the quadriumvirate. Here is the text of the memorable document:

" Fascisti! Italians!

" The time for determined battle has come! Four years ago the National Army loosed at this season the final offensive, which brought it to Victory. To-day the army of the Black Shirts takes again possession of that Victory, which has been mutilated, and going directly to Rome brings Victory again to the glory of that Capital. From now on *principi* and *triari* are mobilized. The martial law of Fascism now becomes a fact. By order of the Duce all the military, political and administrative functions of the Party management are taken over by a secret Quadriumvirate of Action with dictatorial powers.

" The Army, the reserve and safeguard of the Nation, must not take part in this struggle. Fascism renews its highest homage given to the Army of Vittoria Veneto. Fascism, furthermore, does not march against the police, but against a political class both cowardly and imbecile, which in four long years has not been able to give a Government to the Nation. Those who form the productive class must know that Fascism wants to impose nothing more than order and discipline upon the Nation and to help to raise the strength which will renew progress and prosperity. The people who work in the fields and in the factories, those who work on the railroads or in offices,

have nothing to fear from the Fascist Government. Their just rights will be protected. We will even be generous with unarmed adversaries.

" Fascism draws its sword to cut the multiple Gordian knots which tie and burden Italian life. We call God and the spirit of our five hundred thousand dead to witness that only one impulse sends us on, that only one passion burns within us—the impulse and the passion to contribute to the safety and greatness of our Country.

" Fascisti of all Italy!

" Stretch forth like Romans your spirits and your fibres! We must win. We will.

" Long live Italy! Long live Fascism!

" THE QUADRIUMVIRATE."

At night there reached me the first news of bloody crashes in Cremona, Alessandri and Bologna, and of the assaults on munition factories and upon military barracks. I had composed my proclamation in a very short and resounding form; it had impressed the whole of the Italian people. Our life was suddenly brought into an ardent atmosphere of revolution. News of the struggles that happened in the various cities, sometimes exaggerated by the imagination of reporters, gave a dramatic touch to the revolution. Responsible elements of the Country asserted that as a result of this movement there would be at last a Government able to rule and to command respect. The great mass of the population, however, looked out astonished, as it were, from their windows.

None of the subversive or Liberal chiefs showed himself. All went into their holes, inspired only by fear. They understood quite thoroughly that this was the striking of our hour. Everyone felt sure that the struggle of Fascism would have a victorious end. I could sense this even from




THE MARCH ON ROME: THE MAIN RAILWAY STATION IN MILAN PATROLLED BY BLACK SHIRTS

far away. The air was full of it. The wind spoke of it. The rain brought it down. The earth drank it.

I put on the black shirt. I barricaded the *Popolo d' Italia.* In the livid and grey morning Milan had a fantastic and new appearance. Some pauses and some sudden silences gave one the sensation of certain great hours that come and go in the course of history.

Frowning battalions of Royal Guards scouted the city, and the monotonous rhythm of their feet sounded ominous, echoing in the almost deserted streets.

The public services functioned on a reduced and meagre scale. The assaults of the Fascisti against the barracks and on the post offices were the causes of fusillades of shots. This rather gave to the city a sinister echo of civil war.

I had provided the offices of my newspaper with everything for defence against attack. I knew that if the Government authorities desired to give a proof of their strength they would have directed their first violent assault at the *Popolo d' Italia.* In fact, in the early hours of the morning, I saw trained upon the offices and me the ugly muzzles of the mitrailleuses. There was a rapid exchange of shots. I had my rifle charged and I went down to defend the doors. The neighbours had barricaded entrances and windows, and were begging for protection.

During the firing, bullets whistled around my ears.

A major of the Royal Guard finally asked for a truce and to speak with me. After a brief initial conversation we agreed that the Royal Guard would go as far as two hundred metres and the mitrailleuses would be brought away from the middle of the street, to be put at a crossing of the street about a hundred metres away. With that sort of armistice began for me the day of October 28th!

At night deputies, senators, political men of Milan, the

most well-known and responsible of the Lombard parliamentary world—among whom were Senator Conti, Crespi and the Deputy De Capitani—came together to the offices of the *Popolo d' Italia* to ask me to desist in a struggle which they asserted would be the beginning of a violent, grave and reprehensible civil war. They proposed to me a sort of armistice and truce with the Central Government. Perhaps a ministerial crisis might save, they said, the situation and the Country.

I smiled back at the parliamentarians because of their innocence. I answered them in words like these:

"Dear sirs, there is not the slightest question of any partial or total crisis, or of substitution of one Ministry for another. The game I have undertaken has a wider and more serious character. For three years we have lived in a cauldron boiling with small battles and devastation. This time I will not put down weapons until a full Victory is concluded. It is time to change the direction not only of the Government, but also of the whole of Italian life. There is no question of a struggle of Parties in Parliament, but here is a question—we want to know if we Italians are able to live an autonomous life or are to be slave of our own weakness, not only as to foreign nations, but also in our own affairs? War is declared! We will bring it to the bitter end. Do you see these communications? Well, the struggle is blazing all over Italy. Youth is in arms. I am rated as a leader who precedes and not one who follows. I will not humiliate with arbitration this page of marvellous resurrection of Italian youth. I tell you that it is the last chapter. It will fulfil the traditions of our Country. It cannot die in a compromise."

I then showed my visitors a letter, which I received at dawn from Commander Gabriele D'Annunzio. I had

sent a brief message to the redeemer of Fiume who had been with us since the first moments of the darkest struggle. It was brought by the Generals Giampietro and Douhet, and Eugenio Coseleschi. D'Annunzio, toward whom in vain some vague hopes of the politicians had turned, had immediately answered in these terms:

"DEAR MUSSOLINI:

"I received to-night the three messengers, after a hard day of work.

"In this book, so many times interrupted, are gathered the truths that the one-eyed man discovers in retirement and meditation. I think that now Italian youth must recognize them and follow them with purified heart.

"It is necessary to gather together all the sincere forces and start them toward the great goals that are fixed for Italy by her eternal destinies.

"From virile patience and not from restless impatience salvation will come to us.

"The messengers will tell you my thoughts and my intentions, free from all vague colourings.

"The King knows that I am still the most faithful and most eager soldier of Italy.

"Let him stand against the adverse destinies, which must be faced and defeated.

"Victory has the light eyes of Pallas.

"Do not blindfold her.

"Sine strage vincit.

"Strepitu sine ullo.

"GABRIELE D'ANNUNZIO."

After having read the letter of D'Annunzio to these Lombard politicians, I sent them away with the declaration that if I was left with only one man, or indeed all alone, I would not abandon the fight until I had obtained

the final decisive ends as I had outlined them to my associates.

The logical clearness, the stout, rigorous, coherent reasons I had given impressed those who had come to offer conciliation, compromise, concessions.

I think that one of them must have immediately sped off to inform the Premier, Facta, that nothing could be done with me.

Poor Facta, instead of being preoccupied by his shortcomings, was wondering how and to whom he could announce this real crisis among the sham crises. The Chamber was closed at that time. Where could he turn ?

Anyone can see in all events, even in solemn events, that the grotesque and the ludicrous always find a way in, and sometimes prosper under the shadow of great and tragic happenings.

The last of the Liberal Governments of Italy wanted to make its last gesture. It addressed to the Country a declaration composed in the following terms:

"Seditious manifestations are appearing in some of the Italian provinces, brought about in a way to hamper the normal functioning of powers of the State, and are of such nature as to throw the Country into serious trouble.

"The Government has tried to its utmost to reach an agreement, with the hope of bringing back peace to all minds, and to assure a peaceful solution of the crisis. Facing, however, a revolutionary attempt, it has the duty to maintain by any means and at any price public order. Even though its resignations have been made, it will fulfil this duty for the safety of citizens and the safety of the free constitutional institutions.

"Meanwhile the citizens must maintain their calm, and must have faith in the measures of Public Security that have been adopted.

"Long live Italy! Long live the King!

"Signed:

FACTA, SCHANZER, AMENDOLA, TADDEI, ALESSIO, BERTONE, PARATORE, SOLERI, DE VITO, ANILE, RICCIO, BERTINI, ROSSI, DELLO SBARBA, FULCI, LUCIANI."

At the same time the Ministers in charge, considering the situation created in the Country, put their portfolios at the disposition of the President of the Council, Facta. This man sought advice from several friends in Rome. As a result, he offered a decree to proclaim martial law, which the King, in his profound wisdom, flatly refused to sign.

The Sovereign understood that the revolution of the Black Shirts was the conclusion of three years of struggle and of fighting; he understood that only with the victory of one party could we reach pacification and that order and progress in civil life which are indissolubly a part of the nature of active harmony in the Italian people.

Out of respect for the most orthodox constitutional forms, the King allowed Facta to follow the rules of the Constitution. We had then resignations, designations, consultations, communications, charges, and so on and on. At this moment came a sinister manœuvre that impressed me as being ominous. The National Party of the Right, which had a great similiarity of outlook in common with the Fascisti, while it had not the same system of struggle, advanced some singular claims by means of emissaries.

The National Right asserted, in fact, that it was the keystone of the situation. Salandra, who was the most typical representative of the group, was disposed to . . . sacrifice himself and to take upon his back the cross of power. This was to be understood as an aid for the Fascisti. I protested energetically against such a solution, which would have perpetuated compromise and error. Fascism

was under arms, it was dominating the centres of national life, it had a very well-defined aim, it had followed deliberately an extra-parliamentary path and it could not allow its victory to be mutilated or adulterated in such a manner. That was my exact answer to the mediators of the union between the National Right and Fascism ! No compromise.

The struggle continued with the objectives I had mapped out. It is impossible in autobiographic pages to present all the picture of the revolutionary events in those days. I distinctly remember that with every hour that passed I had more poignantly the sensation of dominating triumphantly the Italian political situation. The adversaries were confused, scattered, speechless. The Fascisti in compact files were already near the gates of Rome, and were expecting that I would go at the head of their military formations to march with them into the Capital.

In the afternoon of the 29th I received a very urgent telephone call from Rome on behalf of the Quirinal. General Cittadini, first aide-de-camp of His Majesty the King, asked me very kindly to go to Rome, because the King, having examined the situation, wanted to charge me with forming a Ministry. I thanked General Cittadini for his kindness, but I asked him to give me the same communication by telegram, One knows that the telephone may play some dirty tricks at times. General Cittadini, after having first objected that my request was not usual under the Court regulations, considered however the abnormal and informal situation, and consented to send me the same invitation by telegram. In fact, after a few hours an urgent message arrived. It was of a personal character.

This was it :

" On. Mussolini, Milan,

" His Majesty the King asks you to come immediately to

Rome, for he wishes to offer you the responsibility of forming a Ministry. With respect.

"GENERAL CITTADINI."

This was not yet victory, but the progress made was considerable. I communicated directly with the headquarters of the revolution in Perugia, with the various commands of the Black Shirts in Milan. I gave, by means of an extra edition of the *Popolo d' Italia*, the news of the command I had received.

I was in a terrible state of nervous tension. Night after night I had been kept awake, giving orders, following the compact columns of the Fascisti, restraining the battle to the knightly practices of Fascism.

A period of greater responsibilities was going to begin for me. I must not fail in my duty or in my aims. I gathered all my strength to my aid, I invoked the memory of the dead, I asked the assistance of God, I called upon the living faithful to assist me in the great task that confronted me.

That night of October 31st, 1922, I left the direction of the *Popolo d' Italia*, and turned my fighting journal over to my brother Arnaldo. In the number of November 1st I published the following declaration :

"From now on, the direction of the *Popolo d' Italia* is entrusted to Arnaldo Mussolini.

"I thank and salute with brotherly love all the editors, collaborators, correspondents, employees, workers, all those who have assiduously and faithfully laboured with me for the life of this paper and for love of our Country.

"MUSSOLINI.

"ROME, *October* 30th, 1922."

I parted with regret from the paper that had been the most constant and potent element of our Victory. I must

add that my brother Arnaldo has been able to maintain with dignity and capacity the editorship.

When I had entrusted the paper to my brother, I was off for Rome. To the zealous people who wanted to get me a special train to go to Rome to speak with the King, I said that for me a compartment in the usual train was quite enough. Engines and coal should not be wasted. Economize! That is the first and acid test of a true man of Government. And after all, I could only enter Rome at the head of my Black Shirts now camping at Santa Marinella in the atmosphere and the shining rays of the Capital.

The news of my departure sped all over Italy. In every station where the train stopped there had gathered the Fascisti and the masses who wanted to bring me, even through the pouring rain, their cheers and their goodwill.

Going from Milan was painful. That city had given me a home for ten years; to me it has been prodigal in its satisfactions; it had followed me in every stress; it had baptized the most wonderful squads of action of Fascism; it had been the scene of historical political struggles. Now I was leaving it, called by destiny and by a greater task. All Milan knew of my going, and I felt that even in the feeling of joy for a going that was a symbol of victory, there was also a shade of sadness.

But this was not the hour for sentimentality. It was the time for quick, sure decisions. After the kisses and farewells of my family, I said good-bye to many prominent Milanese; and then I went away, running into the night, to take counsel with myself, to refresh my soul, to listen to the echoes of voices of friends and to envisage the wide horizons of to-morrow's possibilities.

The minor episodes of that trip and of those days are not important. The train brought me into the midst of the Fascisti, I was in view of Rome at Santa Marinella. I



reviewed the columns. I established the formalities for the entrance into Rome. I established connections between the Quadriumvirate and the authorities.

My presence redoubled the great enthusiasm. I read in the eyes of those young men the divine smile of triumph of an ideal. With such elements I would have been inspired to challenge, if need be, not only the base Italian ruling class, but enemies of any sort and race.

In Rome there was waiting for me an indescribable welcome. I did not want any delay. Even before making contacts with my political friends I motored to the Quirinal. I wore a black shirt. I was introduced without formalities to the presence of His Majesty the King. The Stefani agency and the great newspapers of the world gave stilted or speculative details about this interview. I will limit myself, for obvious reasons of reserve, to declare that the conference was characterized by great cordiality. I concealed no plans, nor did I fail to make plain my ideas of how to rule Italy. I obtained the Sovereign's approbation. I took up lodgings at the Savoy Hotel and began to work. First I made agreements with the general command of the army to bring a militia into Rome and file them off in proper formation in a review by the King. I gave detailed and precise orders. One hundred thousand Black Shirts paraded in perfect order before the Sovereign. They brought to him the homage of Fascist Italy!

I was then triumphant and in Rome! I killed at once all unnecessary demonstrations in my honour. I gave orders that not a single parade should take place without the permission of the General Fascist Command. It was necessary to give to everybody, from the first moment, a stern and rigid sense of discipline in line with the regime that I had conceived.

I discouraged every manifestation on the part of army

officers who wanted to bring me their plaudit. I have always considered the army outside and above every kind of politics. The army must, in my opinion, be inspired by absolute and conscientious discipline ; it must only attend with the deepest will the defence of frontiers and of historical rights. The army is an institution which must be preserved inviolate. It must not suffer the slightest loss of its integrity in its own dedication.

But other and more complex problems surged about me in that moment. I was in Rome, not only with the duty of composing a new Ministry ; I had also firmly decided to renew and rebuild from the very bottom, the life of the Italian people. I vowed to myself that I would impel it toward higher and more brilliant aims.

Rome sharpened my sense of dedication. The Eternal City, *caput mundi*, has two Courts and two Diplomacies. It has seen in the course of centuries imperial armies defeated under its walls. It has witnessed and beheld the decays of the strong, and the rise of universal waves of civilization and of thought. Rome, the coveted goal of princes and leaders, the universal city, heir to the old Empire and the power of Christianity ! Rome welcomed me as leader of national legions, as a representative, not of a Party or a group, but of a great faith and of an entire people.

I had long meditated my action as a man of Party and as a man of Government. I had carried these thoughts as I walked by day and even as I slept by night. I had won and could win more. I could nail to the wall, not only metaphorically, but in fact if I had wished, my enemies, those who had slandered Fascism and those who I hated for having betrayed Italy in peace as they had betrayed her during War.

The atmosphere was pregnant with tragedy. I had mobilized three hundred thousand Black Shirts. They

waited for my signal to move. They could be used for one purpose or another. I had in the Capital sixty thousand armed men ready for action. The march on Rome could have set tragic fires. It might have spilled much blood if it had followed the example of ancient and modern revolutions. This was for me a moment in which it was more necessary than ever to examine the field with calm serenity and with cold reason to compare the near and far results of our daring action turned toward definite aims.

I could have proclaimed a dictatorship, I could have formed a dictatorial Ministry composed solely of Fascisti on the type of the Directory that was formed in France at the time of the Convention. The Fascist revolution, however, had its unique characteristics ; it had no antecedent in history. It was different from any other revolution also in its capacity to re-enter, with deliberate will, legal established traditions and forms. For that reason also the mobilization I knew should last only the shortest time.

I did not forget that I had a Parliament on my hands ; a Chamber of Deputies of sullen mind, ready to lay traps for me, accustomed to an old tradition of ambiguity and intrigue, full of grudges, only repressed by fear ; a dismayed Senate from whom I could obtain a disciplined respect, but not an eager and productive collaboration. The Crown was looking on to see what I would do, following constitutional rules.

The Pontificate followed the events with anxiety. The other Nations looked at the revolution suspiciously if not with hostility. Foreign banks were anxious for news. Exchange wavered, credit was still vacillating, waiting for the situation to be cleared. It was indispensable first of all to give the impression of stability to the new Regime.

I had to see, re-see and foresee everything. I slept not at all for some nights, but they were nights fecund in action

and ideas. The measures that immediately followed in the first twenty-four hours of my Government bear witness.

Another problem arose from the character of the revolution. Every revolution has in it, besides the great human mass of impact and the conscientious and unselfish leaders, two other types, adventurers and melancholic intellectuals who might be called, by a synthetic expression, ascetics of revolution. When the revolution is over the mass, which often is moved by the simple intuition of a great historical and social reality, goes peacefully back to its usual activities. It forms the laborious and disciplined leaven of the new Regime. The conscientious and unselfish leaders form the necessary aristocracy of rulers. But the ascetics and the adventurers are a dead burden. The first would like to see overnight a perfect humanity, without faults. They do not understand that there is no revolution that can change the nature of men. Because of their Utopian illusions the ascetics are never contented, they waste their time and other men's energies in sophistry and doubts just when it is necessary to work like fiends to go forward. The adventurers always identify the fortune of the revolution with their own fortune; they hope to gain personal advantage from the victory and they harbour resentment when their wishes are not satisfied, and clamour for extreme and dangerous measures.

Now, I had to defend the Fascist victory from the ascetics and the adventurers. The adventurers, however, sank rapidly in the Fascist revolution, because it was different and on a higher plane than any other revolution.

But I felt it my constant duty to examine and to select, in such a grave moment, every step I made.

First of all in the pressure of events, I desired to assure regularity to the Country and to constitute a new Govern-

ment. Order came quickly. There were only a few sporadic incidents of violence, inevitable under such conditions. I felt the necessity to safeguard Facta, and I called ten Black Shirts, who had each been much decorated for bravery, for the purpose of accompanying Facta to Pinerolo, his native town, under their word of honour. They kept their promise. "Nobody," that was the order, "should touch a hair, mock or humiliate Facta." He had given to the Country his only son, who died in an aeroplane accident during the War, and Facta deserved respect for that and more.

I forbade reprisals against the leaders of the oppositions. It was only by my great authority that I avoided the destruction, not only rhetorical, but also quite real, of my most rabid enemies. I saved their skins for them. At the same time—in the space of a few hours—I constituted a new Ministry. I discarded, as I said, the idea of a Fascist dictatorship, because I wanted to give to the country the impression of a normal life far from the selfish exclusiveness of a Party. That sense of instinct for equilibrium accompanies me fortunately in the gravest, the most strenuous and the most critical moments. I decided then—after having weighed everything—to compose a Ministry of a Nationalist character.

I have had the feeling, as I did then, that later there would become inevitable a process of clarification; but I preferred that it should come forth spontaneously from the succeeding political events.

But that was the last generous gesture that I ever made toward the old Italian ring of parties and politicians.

In the new Ministry, among Ministers and Under-Secretaries of State, were fifteen Fascisti; three Nationalists; three Liberals of the Right; six *Popolari* and three Social Democrats. I was generous toward the Liberals of the Right,

whose peculiar manœuvre in order to pick up for their profit the results of the Fascist revolution had been quite recent. Among the *Popolari* and Social Democrats I selected those who gave promise of national spirit and who did not intrigue with subversive popularism or with Socialism.

I kept for myself, with the Presidency of the Council, the office of the Interior and assumed *ad interim* that of Foreign Affairs. I gave to Armando Diaz the Ministry of War, and I promised to give him an army worthy of the Country and the victor of Vittorio Veneto. I called Admiral Thaon di Revel for the Navy, and Federzoni for the Colonies.

The complete formation of the Ministry was as follows:

Benito Mussolini, Deputy, *Presidency of the Council, Domestic and "interim" of Foreign Affairs* (Fascist).
Armando Diaz, General of the Army, War.
Paolo Thaon di Revel, Admiral, Senator, Navy.
Luigi Federzoni, Deputy, Colonies (Nationalist).
Aldo Oviglio, Deputy, Justice (Fascist).
Alberto De Stefani, Deputy, Finances (Fascist).
Vincenzo Tangorra, Deputy, Treasury (Popolare).
Giovanni Gentile, Professor, Public Instruction (Liberal of the Right).
Gabriello Carnazza, Deputy, Public Works (Democrat).
Giuseppe De Capitani, Deputy, Agriculture (Liberal of the Right).
Teofilo Rossi, Senator, Industry and Commerce (Democrat).
Stefano Cavazzoni, Deputy, Work and Social Providence (Popolare).
Giovanni Colonna di Cesaro', Deputy, Posts and Telegraphs (Social Democrat).
Giovanni Giuriati, Deputy, Liberated Provinces (Fascist).

*Under-Secretaries of State :*

Presidency : Giacomo Acerbo, Deputy (Fascist).
Domestic : Aldo Finzi, Deputy (Fascist).
Foreign : Ernesto Vassallo, Deputy (Popolare).
War : Carlo Bonardi, Deputy (Social Democrat).
Navy : Costanzo Ciano, Deputy (Fascist), with the commisariat of Commercial Marine.
Treasury : Alfredo Rocco, Deputy (Nationalist).
Military assistance : Cesare Maria De Vecchi, Deputy (Fascist).
Finances : Pietro Lissia, Deputy (Social Democrat).
Colonies : Giovanni Marchi, Deputy (Liberal of the Right).
Liberated Provinces : Umberto Merlin, Deputy (Popolare).
Justice : Fulvio Milani, Deputy (Popolare).
Instruction : Dario Lupi, Deputy (Fascist).
Fine Arts : Luigi Siciliani, Deputy (Nationalist).
Agriculture : Ottavio Corgini, Deputy (Fascist).
Public Works : Alessandro Sardi, Deputy (Fascist).
Post and Telegraph : Michele Terzaghi, Deputy (Fascist).
Industry and Commerce : Gronchi Giovanni, Deputy (Popolare).
Labour and Social Providence : Silvio Gai, Deputy (Fascist).

When the Ministry was concluded, I wrote the following paper of demobilization, signed by the Quadriumvirate :

" Fascisti of all Italy !

" Our movement was rewarded by Victory. The leader of our Party has assumed the political powers of the State, both for domestic and for foreign affairs. Our Government, while it consecrates our triumph with the names of those who were the creators of it on the land and on the sea, assembles, with the purpose of national pacification, men from the other Parties, because they are attached to the cause of the Nation.

"The Italian Fascism is too intelligent to desire a greater victory.

"Fascisti!

"The supreme Quadriumvirate of action, turning back its powers to the direction of the Party, salutes you for your marvellous proof of courage and discipline. You have served your merit in the future of the Country.

"Disperse with the same perfect order with which you gathered for the great trial, destined—we firmly think—to open a new epoch in Italian history. Go back to your usual work, because Italy now needs to work peacefully to reach its better day.

"Nothing must trouble the powerful stride of the Victory that we acquired in these days of proud passion and sovereign magnitude.

"Long live Italy. Long live Fascism!

"THE QUADRIUMVIRATE."

Then I sent a telegram to D'Annunzio and I distributed an energetic circular to all the Prefects of the Kingdom and to the small authorities. The telegram to D'Annunzio said:

"Assuming the hard task of giving discipline and internal peace to the Nation. I send to you, Commander, my affectionate greetings for you and for the destinies of the Country. The valiant Fascist youth which gives back a soul to the Nation will not blindfold Victory.

"MUSSOLINI."

The text of the circular sent to office holders was the following:

"From to-day, entrusted with the confidence of His Majesty the King, I undertake the direction of the Government of the Country. I demand that all authorities, from



the highest to the least, discharge their duty with intelligence and with complete yielding to the supreme interests of the Country.

"I will give the example.

"The President of the Council and Ministry of the Interior.

"Signed: MUSSOLINI."

I announced finally, for November the 16th, a meeting of the Chamber of Deputies, to render an account of what I had done, and to announce my intentions and programme.

It was an exceptional meeting. The hall was filled to overspilling. Every deputy was present. My declarations were brief, clear, energetic. I left no misunderstanding. I affirmed sharply the rights of revolution. I called the attention of the audience to the fact that only by the will of Fascism had the revolution remained in the boundaries of legality and tolerance.

"I could have made," I said, "of this dull and grey hall a bivouac for corpses. I could have nailed up the doors of Parliament and have established an exclusively Fascist Government. I could have done those things, but at least for a time I did not do them."

I then thanked all my collaborators and I pointed with sympathy to the multitude of Italian labourers who had aided the Fascist movement with their active or passive solidarity.

I did not expose one of the usual programmes that the past Ministries used to present; for these solved only on paper the problems of the Country. I asserted my will to act and to act without delaying for useless oratory of talk. In the field of foreign politics I squarely declared the intention of following a "policy of dignity and national utility."

For every subject I made declarations of weight that showed how Fascism had already been able to assay and analyse and solve varying and urgent problems, and to fix the future outlines of Government. Finally I concluded :

" Gentlemen :

" From further communications you will know the Fascist programme in its details. I do not want, as long as I can avoid it, to rule against the Chamber ; but the Chamber must feel its own position. That position opens the possibility that it may be dissolved in two days or in two years. We ask full powers, because we want to assume full responsibility. Without full powers you know very well that we couldn't save one lira—I say, one lira. We do not want to exclude the possibility of voluntary co-operation, for we will cordially accept it, if it comes from deputies, senators, or even from competent private citizens. Every one of us has a religious sense of our difficult task. The Country cheers us and waits. We will not give it words, but facts. We formally and solemnly promise to restore the Budget to health. And we will restore it. We want to make a foreign policy of peace, but at the same time one of dignity and steadiness. We will do it. We intend to give the Nation a discipline. We will give it. Let none of our enemies of yesterday, of to-day, of to-morrow, be illusioned in regard to our permanence in power. Foolish and childish illusion, like those of yesterday !

" Our Government has a formidable foundation in the conscience of the Nation. It is supported by the best, the newest Italian generations. There is no doubt that in these last years a great step toward the unification of spirits has been made. The Fatherland has again found itself bound together from north to south, from the continent to the generous islands, which will never be forgotten, from the

metropolis to the active colonies of the Mediterranean and the Atlantic Ocean. Do not, Gentlemen, address more vain words to the Nation. Fifty-two applications to speak about my communications to Parliament are too many. Let us, instead of talking, work with pure heart and ready mind to assure the prosperity and the greatness of the Country.

"May God assist me in bringing to a triumphant end by hard labour."

I do not believe that, since 1870, the hall of Montecitorio had heard energetic and clear words. They burned with a passion deep in my being. There were in that speech the essences of my old and my recent wrestlings with my own mind and my own soul. More than one deputy had to repress all the rancour generated by my deserved reproaches; but my exposition in Parliament was compensated by the approval of the whole of Italy. I was looking farther than that old hall of Parties, of petty power and of politicians. I was speaking to the entire Nation. It listened to me and it understood me!

My political instinct told me that from that moment there would rise with increasing truth and expanse of Fascist work the dawn of new history for Italy.

And perhaps dawn on a new path of civilization. . . .

# CHAPTER VIII

## FIVE YEARS OF GOVERNMENT

MY revolutionary method and the power of the Black Shirts had brought me to a tremendous responsibility of power. My task, as I have pointed out, was neither simple nor easy; it required a large vision, it gathered continually more and more duties.

An existence wholly new began for me. To speak about it makes it necessary for me to abandon the usual form of autobiographic style, I must consider the organic whole of my governmental activity. From now on my life identifies itself almost exclusively with thousands of acts of government. Individuality disappears. Instead, the person expresses. I sometimes feel only measures and acts of concrete character, these do not concern a single person; they concern the multitudes, they concern and permeate an entire people. So one's whole life is lost in the whole.

Certainly I know that I took the direction of the Government when the central power of the State was sinking to the bottom. We had a financial situation that Peano of the Liberal Party had summarized with an astounding figure: six milliards of deficit! Individually the people fed on expedients. Progressive inflation and the printing-presses gave to everybody the old illusion of prosperity. It created an unstable delusion of well-being; it excited a fictitious game of interests. All that had to be expiated when faced by the severe Fascist financial policy.

Abroad, our political reputation had diminished progres-

sively. We were judged as a nation without order and discipline, unable either to prosper or produce. The chronic infection of disorder had withdrawn from us the sympathies of countries better equipped than we were. Worse yet, it had increased the haughtiness and the contempt of many of our enemies.

The Italian school system, in its complex formation, university, middle and lower schools, had turned its energies into purely abstract, theoretical functions; it had withdrawn more and more from a real world, a modern world, and from the fundamental problems of national life; it had been inert as a guide to civil duties. Schools and pulpits should always show to ascending peoples the way.

There still lived, in the national mechanism, strange and hateful regionalistic formations; these used to put in discussion, if not in peril, our solidarity. The activities of the Government in terms of services, improvements and appropriations were guided and effected, not by real natural necessities, but to ingratiate this or that population, or region. The Treasury was tapped by this base policy of politics—electoral strategy.

A bureaucracy, already suffering from elephantiasis, increased its distension, generating that spirit of trouble, those characters of instability, of intolerance, of slight love for duty, which are typical in all great accumulations of functionaries, especially when they are not well paid, and do not see their moral prestige supported and built up by the authority of the State and by precise and clear definition of individual responsibility.

We still had, in consequence of our generous struggle, the Fascist squadron formations. They might become—in the new conditions of life—a danger threatening public order and legality.

The Army and the Navy lived apart from the great problem of national life. As a matter of fact, though this is good in many respects, it is not good when they are set aside in an almost humiliated formation. Aviation was in disorder. It was difficult to give it new strength. One must not forget, speaking of aviation, that Nitti had forbidden flight, not only to the military planes, but also to the private planes. The command was to demobilize aviation, and to sell the motors as well as the aeroplanes. It was a kind of murder *prepense* of a Nation, which really did not want to be strangled.

In the meantime in Rome there assembled all the arms and legs of anti-Fascism and in all its gradations. The political parties, at first dismayed by the revolution of the Black Shirts and my advent to power, began again to revive. They began to take courage to pursue again the general trend of political parties in the equivocal atmosphere of the Parliamentary corridors at Montecitorio. The Italian Press was, for the greater part, tied to old groups and old political customers.

It was necessary to recognize all civil life, without forgetting the organic problem of a watchful force. It was necessary to give order to political economy, to the schools, to our military strength. It was necessary to abolish double functions, to reduce bureaucracy, to improve public services. It was necessary to hold back the corroding and erosion of criticism developed by the remnants of old political parties. I had to fight the external attacks. I had to refine and improve Fascism. I had to divide and floor the enemies. I saw the vision that I must in every respect work to improve and give tonic to all the manners and customs of Italian political life.

It was then indispensable not to neglect the ten millions of Italians emigrated beyond the frontiers. We had to

give again faith to the zones on our borders. We had to assist in bringing modern improvements and stimuli to the life of the southern regions and get in touch with all the men of the healthy and strong provinces wherever they were.

Infinite were then the problems and the worries. I had to decide everything, and I had the firm will to summon all the political postulates that I had enunciated and sustained with pen and paper, in meetings and in my Parliamentary speeches. This was not only a problem of strength to last, to endure, to stand erect in any wind, but also, above all, a problem of will.

I abandoned everything that kept me tied to the fortunes of my newspaper; I parted from everything that could have the slightest personal character. I devoted myself wholly, completely, exclusively, to work of reconstruction.

To-day there is no change. I want to be a simple, devoted servant of the State; chief of a party, but, first, worthy head of a strong Government. I abandoned without regret all the superfluous comforts of life. I made only an exception for sports which, while making my body alert and ready, succeeded in creating in my complex life of work healthy and happy intervals. In these six years—with exception of official dinners—I have never passed the threshold of an aristocrat's salon, or of a café. I have almost entirely abandoned also the theatre, which once took away from me useful hours of evening work.

I love all sports; I drive with confidence a motor-car, I have done tours at great speed, amazing not only to my friends, but also to old and experienced drivers. I love the aeroplane; I have flown numberless times.

When I was kept busy by the cares of power, I needed only a few lessons to obtain a pilot's license. I fell once from a height of fifty metres, but that did not stop my

flying. Motors give me a new and great sensation of strength. A horseback ride on a magnificent sorrel is also for me a joyous interruption, and fencing, to which I devote myself, often with remarkable physical advantage, gives me the greatest satisfaction. I ask of my violin nothing more than serene hours of music. To the great poets, as Dante, to the supreme philosophers, as Plato, I ask of them often hours of poetry, hours of meditation.

No other amusement interests me. I do not drink; I do not smoke and I am not interested in cards or games. I pity those who lose time, money and sometimes all of life itself in the frenzy of games.

As for the love of the table, I don't appreciate it. I do not feel it. Especially in these last years my meals are sober as those of a pauper. In every hour of my life it is the spiritual element which leads on. Money has no lure for me. The only things for which I aim are those which identify themselves with the greatest objects of life and civilization, with the highest interests and the real and deep aspirations of my Country. I am sure of my strength and my faith; for that reason, I do not indulge in any concession or any compromise. I leave, without a look over my shoulder, my foes and those who cannot overtake me. I leave them with their political dreams. I leave them with their strength of oratorical and demagogic exertion.

Italy needed what? An avenger! Her political and spiritual resurrection wanted a worthy interpreter. It was necessary to cauterize the virulent wounds, to have strength, and to be able to go against the current. It was necessary to eliminate the evils which threatened to become chronic. It was requisite to curb political dissolution. I had to bring to the blood-stream of national life a new serene and powerful lymph of the Italian people.

Voting was reduced to a childish game; it already had



humiliated the Nation for entire decades. It had created a perilous structure far from the heights of the duties of any new Italy. I faced infinite enemies. I created new ones! I had few illusions about that! The struggle, in my opinion, had to have a complete character; it had to be brought whole and complete on all of the most diverse fields of action.

Given this character of completeness of the whole, I must be able to set it forth in a clear, evident way; it is necessary for me to divide, set forth in subdivisions, the different fields in which my action was demanded and out of which evolved the most significant facts of my Governmental life. Deeds and actions, more than any useless subjective expressions, write my true autobiography—from 1922 till 1927.

I never had any parenthesis of uncertainty; fortunately, I never knew those discouragements or those exaltations which often are harmful to the effectiveness of a Statesman. I understood that not only my prestige was at stake, but the prestige, the name of the Country, which I love more than myself, more than anything else.

I was anxious to improve, refine and co-ordinate the character of the Italians. Let me state what my domestic policies have been, what was charted and what was achieved. From petty discords and quarrels of holiday and Sunday frequency, from the many-coloured political partizanships, from peasant strifes, from bloody struggles, from the insincerity and duplicity of the Press; from the Parliamentary battles and manœuvres, from the vicissitudes of representative lobbies, from hateful and useless debates and snarling talk we finally climbed up to a solidified nation, to a powerful harmony—dominated, inspired and spiritualized by Fascism. I am not the judge of that. The world is.

After my speech of November 16th, 1922, at the Chamber of Deputies, I obtained approval for my declaration with

306 votes against 116. I asked and obtained without difficulty full powers.

I made a decree of amnesty which created the atmosphere of peace. I had to solve the problem of our armed Fascist squadrons. I always have had a great influence on my soldiers and on the action squads, which in every part of Italy gave proof of their valour, gallantry and of their passionate faith. But now that Fascism had reached power, these formations in such a situation were no longer desirable.

On the other hand, I could not suddenly wipe out or simply direct toward the sporting fields these men who had for me a deep, blind and absolute devotion. In their instinct, in their vibrating intuitions, they were led not only by strength and courage, but by a sense of political virtue. And as the perils had not entirely disappeared, it was indispensable to guard the Black Shirt's triumph. I decided then to create a voluntary Militia for National security and defence. Of course its duties had to be well defined. It must be commanded by seasoned veterans and chiefs who, after having fought the War, had known and experienced the struggles of Fascist resurrection.

I proclaimed that with Fascism at the wheel everything illegal and disorderly had to disappear. The decision to transform the squads of action to voluntary Militia for National security, undoubtedly was one of political wisdom; it conferred on the Regime not only authority, but also a great reserve strength.

The organization of the Grand Council, a body exquisitely political, was one of my major aims after my coming to power. I faced the necessity of creating a political organization typically Fascist, which would be outside and above the various old political mechanisms dominating and misruling our national life. Every day I needed clear answers to

questions arising—a body of reference. In all my complex work as Chief of the Government, I could not forget that I was also Chief of that Party that for three years had fought in the squares and streets of Italy—not only to gain power, but above all for the supreme task and the supreme necessity of infusing into the Nation a new spirit.

The Great Council had to be the propelling element of Fascism, with the hard and delicate task of preparing and transforming into legal acts the work of the Fascist revolution. There were not, and there are not now, heterogeneous elements in the Grand Council, but virile Fascists, ministers, representative of our largest currents and streams of public opinion, expert knowledge and interests. The Grand Council has always succeeded. I preside over it, and let me add, as a detail, that all the motions and the official reports which had appeared in the papers in concise form have been written by my hand. They are the product of long meditations in which Italian life and the position of Italy in the world have been examined and dissected by the Fascist soul, spirit and faith. The Grand Council, which to-day I want framed in the legislative institutions of the Regime, has rendered in the first five years a magnificent unparalleled service.

One of the problems which imposed itself first of all was that of the unification of the police forces. We had the ordinary police, with the different branches of political and judiciary police; the Royal Carabinieri; and finally, the body of the Royal Guards. This last institution, created by Nitti, was made up of demobilized elements and was a useless organization, finding its place somewhere between the Carabinieri and the usual forces of public security. I decided immediately to suppress the Royal Guards. That suppression in the main was not attended by unfortunate incidents. In some cities, as Torino and Milano,

there were attempts at resistance and tumults. I gave severe orders. I called into my office or telephoned to the chiefs responsible for certain local situations. I ordered them to fire, if necessary. In six hours everything was calm again. The immediate dissolving of an armed body of forty thousand men cost only four dead and some tens of wounded. The officers were incorporated in some other organizations, or took up activities according to their own wishes; the privates reached their districts and homes without further troubles.

Our Italian form of political masonry that at first seemed to have adjusted itself to the new conditions, submitting to the advent of Fascism to power, now began a stupid and deceitful warfare against me and against Fascism. In a meeting of the Grand Council I proclaimed the impossibility for Fascisti to be members at the same time of Masonry. As a leader of the ranks of Socialism I had already practised the same anti-masonic policy. We must not forget that this shady institution, with its secret character, has always had in Italy the typical character of briber and blackmailer. It has nothing of protection, humanitarianism, assistance. Everyone, even those who were benefited, are convinced that Italian Masonry has been nothing more than a society of mutual aid and of reciprocal adulation for its adepts. Everyone knows that it has diffused in every way a worship of self-interest, and methods of privilege and intrigue, neglecting and despising, rights and prerogatives of intelligence and morality. My struggle against Masonry was bitter; I carry the tangible signs of it still, but it constitutes for me, for my sincerity and my probity, one of the most precious titles of merit.

In 1923, after negotiations carried on with unwavering constancy, I united Italian Nationalism with Fascism. For a certain time an identical vision had been shared by

these two organizations about everything that referred to the ends and aims of our national life. The political developments, however, led along separate paths. When victory was concluded, and when the better elements of Nationalism already were collaborating with the new Regime, the unification was more than a wise act, for it was also an act of political sincerity. Black Shirt and Blue Shirt—the latter was the uniform of the Nationalists—united in a perfect chivalrous sentiment and political loyalty. This new and deep unity allowed us to enjoy and develop better auspices for a new future, worthy of that great Italy which had been prophesied, desired and finally created by Nationalism and Fascism.

In April 1923, in Turin, there assembled the national congress of the "Popular Party." It was a verbose and academic meeting, not very different from other political congresses that for decades hypnotized Italian public life. They naturally discussed the policies of the Fascist Regime for a long while and, after various divergencies, the majority of those assembled voted in favour of a position of middle-ground with an anti-Fascist leaning.

Among the members of my ministry there were some of the "Popular Party"; they found themselves, after the meeting, in a difficult and delicate position. I naturally put before them the problem of weighing more or less their opportunity of staying in the Fascist Government, under the new state of things created by the attitude of their Party. There were some explanations. Differing opinions alternated; but in order to initiate that process of political clarification that I had foreseen inevitable, I advised the members of the Government of the Popular Party to leave their places so that they could avoid dissensions between their Parliamentary group and the Fascist Party.

This process of clarification I had foreseen as soon as I

went into power. The climate and altitude of Fascism was not adapted for all minds of that time. There were still many dissenters. Many people fed on the illusory hope that they would be able to influence and bend the methodical and straight courses laid out by Fascism. For this purpose I was approached by those who were skilled in twistings, turnings and slidings. Naturally, they always found me as resistant as flint.

For the first time in 1923 our Labour Day passed without incidents; the people worked calmly, without regretting that old date that now had lost in Italy every meaning. Later on I wanted to get in touch with the public opinion of Italy and measure how deep Fascism had penetrated the masses. First I went to Milan and to Romagne. Afterwards I went to Venice, Padua, Vicenza, Sicily and Sardinia; finally I journeyed to Piacenza and Florence. I found everywhere warm, vibrant enthusiasm, not only among my lieutenants and the Black Shirts, but also among all of the Italian people. That people finally sensed that it had a Government and a Leader.

The Black Shirts, the makers of the revolution, hailed me as a leader with the same unchangeable enthusiasm they had shown when I was only the Chief of the Party and when I was developing that programme of journalistic attack, which had added so much to my popularity. The Italian temperament at times is much more adapted for faction than for action. But now my old comrades were just as near to me with their daily tasks and their regimented discipline. Their attitude not only made me proud, but moved me deeply. I could not ignore this warm youth so full of ardour, and I was quite decided not to sacrifice it to the compromises with an old world destined to disappear. The population felt that it had recovered a real liberty; they had felt liberation from the continuous blackmails of

parties which deluded the masses. They blessed my political work. And I was happy.

It was in this period that the campaign of the opposition opened again. Not being able to beat me on the field of conciliation and compromise, the opposing elements, led by the *Corriere della Sera,* began a series of depressing prophecies and calamity howling. They launched deceitful attacks and spun their polemic webs. I put into effect, however, a new electoral law, because I did not want to fall into the pitfalls of the old mistake of our proportional representative system. I had aleniated the " Populars," the Democrats and some of the Liberals. The reform of the school about which I will speak more had invited some hostilities.

Meanwhile, we had anti-Fascist assaults and ambushes. This was a stormy year. It must be regarded as a period of settling and one of difficulty. I had to keep Fascism from internal crises, often provoked by intrigue and trickery. I succeeded in this by being always inexorably against those who thought they could create disturbances and frictions in the Party itself. Fascism is a unit ; it cannot have varying tendencies and trends, as it cannot have two leaders on any one level of organization. There is a hierarchy ; the foundation is the Black Shirts and on the summit the Chief, who is only one.

That is one of the first causes of my strength ; all the dissolutions in our political parties were always born not from ideal reasons, but from personal ambitions, from false preconceptions or from corruption, or from mysterious, oblique and hidden forces which I could always identify as the work of our Italian Masonry. I took account of all this. I resolved not to yield a hair's-breadth. When the more urgent legislative problems were settled by Parliament I decided to dissolve the Chamber, and after having obtained

extension of full powers, I announced elections for April 6th, 1924.

This signal for elections was sufficient to calm political agitation of dubious character. All the parties began their stocktaking and revision of their forces. All got ready to have the greatest number of votes and to send to the Chamber the greatest possible number of representatives.

Election may be considered a childish play, in which the most important part is played by the elected ones. The " Honourables," to be able to become so, do not neglect any element of contortion, of demagogy and compromise. Fascism did not want to submit to the usual forms of that silly farce. We decided to create a large national list in which places had to be found not only for known tried and faithful custodians and trustees of Fascism, but also for those who in the active national life had been able to uphold the dignity of their Country. Fascism by this policy gave full proof of great political wisdom and probity. It even tolerated men of opposing or doubtful position because they could serve. In the national list were included ex-Presidents of the Council, as Orlando, and of the Chamber, as De Nicola, but the fulcrum of the list was made up of new elements. In fact, it was composed of two hundred veterans, ten gold medals, one hundred and fourteen silver medals, ninety-eight bronze medals, eighty mutilated and war invalids, thirty-four volunteers. Such a list was constituted in its majority from the aristocracy of the War and the Victory.

The Socialists, divided from the Communists, sharpened their weapons, and so did the Populars. But from the ballot boxes of April 6th there overflowed a full, irrevocable, decisive victory for the National list. It obtained five million votes against two million represented by all the other lists put together. My policy and our regime was



supported by the people. I then could be indulgent toward our adversaries without trying to press them harder as I could have done.

I directed that political battle staying in Milan. I gave no great importance to the electoral struggle because of its results, but it interested me because of the consent and the enthusiasm which in every Italian city was already given to the National Fascist list. This endorsement of the people encouraged my thesis and my governmental work. Having gone back to Rome I was received as a returning victor, and, from the balcony of the Palazzo Chigi, while I saluted the people and the city of Rome, I congratulated the new and greater Italy, where men of good faith were all in harmony.

This was my synthesis : Let Parties die and the Country be saved.

On May 24th, with unusual solemnity, came the opening of the 27th Legislature. His Majesty the King made a very impressive speech. The hall had the appearance of a great occasion. For petty political reasons the elements which denied the Country and belittled Italian life determined to stay away. The inauguration of the 27th Legislature, however, did not miss anything in its fullness and moral value. Particularly well received were the veterans, some of whom were very much decorated. Now there stirred, in that old Chamber used to mean petty political intrigues, a breath of new life ; there was present an heroic sense of the new soul of Italy, and of a living aspiration for greatness.

All these things irritated the Socialists. They in their hearts had hated the War, had humiliated our Victory. The old Parliamentary world could not adjust itself to this magnificent gathering of youth. The congenital cowardliness of Montecitorio, the seat of Parliament, would certainly

not give homage to the bravery symbolized by golden medals!

The deep dissension between the new and the old Italy was again drawn at Montecitorio. This dissension persisted in the Parliamentary atmosphere, even after it had been beaten and overcome by the Fascism in the places and streets of Italy, and in the hearts of a nation. In the historical meeting of May 24th, 1924, that sad antithesis had to have its epilogue. Not by mere chance had I chosen the precise date of our entrance into the War.

There began after some days the usual Parliamentary discussions. The seating of new deputies roused violent diatribes. The Socialists who were absent from the ceremony of May 24th, had taken again their place of combat. The atmosphere was incandescent. I knew it would be necessary to give a different tune to all our political life, especially to Parliamentary life. There was no use in having illusions about that. With very great patience I succeeded in appeasing the first tulmultuous meetings. To elevate the plane of the discussion nothing was more effective than a speech, spoken on June 6th by the blind veteran, Carlo Delcroix. On June 7th I answered exhaustively all the opponents. I denounced their manœuvres. I remember that I admonished all in the name of Fascist Martyrdom, and in the name of the peace of souls, to attend solely to productive activities. I added: "We feel that we represent the Italian people and we declare that we have the right to scatter to the winds the ashes of your spites and our spites, so that we may feed with powerful lymph, in the course of years and centuries, the venerable and intangible body of the Country."

I felt the necessity to make in Parliament a high invocation for calm, for a sense of balance and justice. I was animated by a deep and sincere desire for peace. But the success of

my words was only apparent; in the ardours of Parliamentary political struggle there happened scenes unworthy of any assembly.

The Socialists had been hit on the most sensitive spots; they had been slammed against reality. They were circumscribed in number, amazed by the rush of Italian youth, dismayed by the new directions events were taking. All the new political realism met with full antagonism all their leanings; they were beaten and they felt it. In such a situation, the Socialists wanted to squeeze out the ways of last resort to avoid surrender, at least, in Parliament.

Skilful and astute in every political art, they protracted without end all the provocations they could devise. It was a game deliberately played to destroy and tear down. In this subtle work of exasperation above all Matteotti, the deputy, distinguished himself. He was a Socialist from the province of Rovigo, tenacious in his arrogant spirit of political dissolution. As a Socialist he hated war. In this attitude he reached an absurdity, even beyond the limits reached by any other Socialist. In the tragic period after the defeat at Caporetto, he had been against our Venetian refugees. Matteotti denied a shelter for those unhappy people who fled from the lands then invaded by the enemy and where the Austrians were committing every sort of violence. He said they should remain under Austrian domination!

Now to this Parliamentary polemic battle he brought his whole bag of conceptions and devices. Being a millionaire, he considered Socialism as a mere Parliamentary formula. It was to be remembered though that he was an ardent fighter, able to irritate his adversaries in the whirlwind of the struggle, but he was far away from being able to imperil seriously the assembly and still such a Party as the Fascist. Matteotti was not a leader. In that same Socialist Party

there were elements who surpassed him in debate, in talent, and in coherence. In his electoral districts he had had violent fights with the Fascists, and at the Chamber he had at once revealed himself as the most zealous and pugnacious opponent.

One day Matteotti disappeared from Rome. Immediately it was whispered that a political crime had been committed. The Socialists were looking for a martyr who might be of use for their oratory, and at once, before anything definite could possibly be known, they accused Fascism. By my orders we began the most anxious and complete investigations. The Government decided to act with the greatest energy, not only for reasons of justice, but also to stop, from the first moment, the spreading of any kind of calumny. I threw the Prefect and Police Chief of Rome, the Secretary of the Interior, Finzi, and the Chief of the Press Office, Cesare Rossi, into the labour of clearing the mystery. The work of the Police for the discovery of the guilty persons was ordered without stint. Very soon it was possible to identify the guilty. They were of high station. They came from the Fascist group, but they were completely outside our responsible elements.

The sternest proceedings were taken against them without limit or reservation. Severe measures were applied—so severe, indeed, that for some they turned out to be excessive.

The suspected were arrested at once. Among the responsible elements those who had had relations with the guilty ones, merely because they were under suspicion, retired, though innocent, from public life. Not a thread of restraint was given to the authorities, the police and the courts.

All this should have stilled the storm.

On the contrary. This dramatic episode was destined to disturb the austere serenity that I had imposed for myself

and for everyone in the general policy of the Country. Though we were still living in an incandescent atmosphere of passion, of polemics and violent battles, it seemed hardly possible that only a few days after the opening of the 27th Legislature a group of men of position could carry out an enterprise which, commenced as a jest, had to conclude in a tragedy. I always have had harsh and severe words for what happened. But in the face of the faithful and energetic behaviour of the Central Government, there now burst out an offensive without comparison against Fascism and against its leader. The opposition at the Chamber gave the first signal of attack in great style. I perceived and foresaw immediately the ignoble game which started, not from any love for the poor victim, but solely from hate for Fascism. I was not surprised. At the Chamber, when already weak men were hesitating, I said:

"If the question is to lament, if the question is to condemn, if the question is to regret the victim, if the question is to proceed on our inquiry of all the guilty and those responsible, we here repeat that this will be done calmly and inexorably. But if from this very sad happening one would draw argument, not for a wider reconciliation of all men on the basis of an accepted and recognized need of national concord, but if anyone would try to stage upon this tragedy a show of selfish political character to attack the Government, it must be known that the Government will defend itself at any cost. The Government having an undisturbed conscience and being sure of having already fulfilled its duty and being willing to do it in the future, will adopt the necessary means to crush that trick which, instead of leading to the harmony of Italians, would trouble them with the deepest dissensions and passions."

These words did not penetrate the minds already hardened. And there happened exactly what I had foreseen; the

opposition threw themselves on the corpse of Matteotti to poison the political life of Italy and cast calumnies on Fascism both in Italy and abroad.

The development of the Italian public life from June till December 1924 gave a spectacle absolutely unparalleled in the political struggle of any other country. It was a shame and a mark of infamy which would dishonour any political group. The Press, the meetings, the subversive and anti-Fascist Parties of any quality, the false intellectuals, the defeated candidates, the brain-soft cowards, the rabble, the parasites, threw themselves like ravens on a corpse. The arrest of the guilty was not enough. The discovery of the corpse and the sworn verification of surgeons which stated that the death was not due to a crime, but was produced by trauma, was not enough.

Instead, the discovery of the corpse in a hedge near Rome, called the Quartarella, unstopped an orgiastic research of details, which is remembered by us with the ignominious name of " Quartarellismo."

On the Matteotti tragedy there were built fortunes; they speculated on portraits, on medals, on commemorative dates, on electric signs; a subscription was opened by subversive newspapers and even now the accounts are still open.

The opposition parties and their representatives at the Chamber retired from Montecitorio, and they threatened not to participate further in legislative work; to this movement and to those who accepted it was given, for an illusory analogy with the well-known event of Roman history, the name of Aventino. But the Aventino group was reduced to a grotesque parody, in which hate and nakedness of power now reunited men of the most different political complexions. They went all the way from Socialists to Liberals, from Democrat-Masons, to Populars, who

pretended to be called Catholics. Clandestine meetings were held. They abused in every way the liberty of the Press and of assembly to destroy Italian life. Fanatical elements waited hour by hour for Fascism to be overthrown. On the background of this ignoble dramatic farce there stood out the figure of Senator Albertini, the happy owner of a newspaper. This one wanted to scrape in the garbage, listen to all the dirty rogues, collect the most mendacious pamphlets, trying to hit at me and at Fascism somehow, sometime, somewhere.

I did not have a moment of doubt or discouragement. I knew the attitudes, postures and poses of these adversaries. I knew they would have ignobly used the corpse of the Socialist deputy, to make of it if they could an anti-Fascist symbol and flag. But their ghoulish politics passed my imagination. Besides these speculators there were the timid and flabby fringes of Fascism. They let themselves be wheedled by the political atmosphere. They did not perceive that an episode is not the stuff of which history should be made. In the name of a so-called sentimental morality, they wanted to kill a great moral and political probity and knife the welfare of an entire Nation.

There were also in this circumstance many repented Magdalenes, and many—drawn by the sad habit of many Italians to consider as pure gold the acts and the work of any oppositions—hid their Fascist insignia and, trembling, they abandoned the Fascist nation, already made red-hot by a thousand attacks and counter-attacks of the adversaries.

We were going back into the depths of a revolutionary period, with all the excesses of such abnormal times with spites, troubles, explosions. An atmosphere was formed in which many magistrates, often under Masonic influence, could certainly not give equitable and faultless judgments.

Various parties beyond the borders gave help to the Socialists at home. It was then clear how anti-Fascism was still abroad in some international zones where Democracy, Socialism and Liberalism had consolidated their weight of patronage, blackmail and parasitism.

All this could have given for a moment, in some political atmospheres, the illusion that the Government had weakened. In December 1924, at the end of that painful three months, some calculated the days of life of our Ministry. A great hope sprang upon the hearts of the politically hungry. There was, in fact, a miserable manœuvre on the part of the three former Presidents of the Council; they were able to delude themselves and others. But these professional political men have so little practical sense that they could not understand that it would have been enough for me with one breath to give an order to the Black Shirts to overturn once for all their fancies and dreams.

The swelled frogs waited for their triumph. The corrupt Press gave the maximum of publicity to the calumnies, to incitation to commit crimes and to spread defamation. The Crown, supreme element of equilibrium, was violently menaced with blackmail and worse. As ever, there were adventurers who wanted to speculate on any turn in the tide of events to create again for themselves a political rebirth. This base and pernicious crew I, for my part, have always eliminated from the sphere of activity and position controlled by me.

As if all this were not enough, in that dark December of 1924, to complete the picture, Cesare Rossi, the former chief of the Press Office, tried a rascally trick. This man, cast out from Fascism because implicated in the Matteotti affair, prepared a memorial which was a tissue of lies and libels. He aimed at involving the Regime in guilt and



consequently me. Everything that had happened or was happening in Italy he endeavoured to put on my doorstep. This memorial, written by such a man, pretended to present a "moral indictment" against me. But in that field I cannot be attacked, every attempt of this sort is empty. I was informed beforehand of the plot that Rossi was going to attempt; I knew the contents of his memorial, and the day on which it was to be printed in the papers of the opposition I put an end to the miserable manœuvre. I published the memorial in a friendly paper; in this way I indicated that I gave no value to it. It was a jest and a delusion. The theatrical stroke fell on emptiness; the bubble swelled by slanders flattened like a pricked balloon.

The contemptible game lasted six months. The weak consciences had sunk under the surface, the singers of the doleful tunes felt their throats parched. The speculators were now disgusted with themselves. In that period a former Minister, decorated with the Collare dell' Annunziata, the highest order of Italy's sovereign, aligned himself with the cult of republicanism and with the worst elements of the Socialists!

I held firmly in my hand during this period the Fascist Party. I curbed the impulses of some Fascists who wanted violent reprisals with a clear order: "Hands in the pockets!" I am the only one that must have his hands free. However, in Florence and Bologna there happened some episodes of extreme violence. I understood then that it was time to speak and act.

In all that time I credit myself with the fact that I never lost my calm nor my sense of balance and justice. Because of serene judgment that I endeavour to summon for every act of mine, I ordered the guilty to be arrested. I desired justice to follow its unwavering course. Now I had fulfilled

my task and my duty as a just man. So I now could have against the adversaries, my own game—in the open.

When there was menace of a general strike in the Province of Rome I ordered the Florentine legions of the Militia to parade in the streets of the Capital. The armed Militia with its war-songs is an element of great persuasion. It is an argument. In September 1924 I had visited the most intense zones of the Tuscan Fascism; I went among the strong populations of the Amiata, among the workers and peasants, among the miners of the province of Siena. On that occasion, while opponents waited my fall hour by hour, and that was also the secret hope of many enemies beyond the borders, I said to the Fascists an audacious sentence which sounded as an affirmation of strength and victory.

Of our adversaries, I said, "We will make a litter for the Black Shirts."

The opposition Press made a great fuss about these words; but their chattering had no importance. That became clear on January 3rd, 1925. That day, in the Parliament, while Rome was already full of the exiled from the provinces and those who tremblingly expected the conclusion of the political struggle, I made this speech, which certainly was not lacking in reserve:

"Gentlemen,

"The speech I am going to make before you might not be classified as a parliamentary speech. It might be possible that at the end, some of you will find that this speech is fastened, even though a space of time has elapsed, to the one I pronounced in this same hall on November 16th. Such a speech can lead, but it cannot lead to a political vote. In any case let it be known that I am not looking for this vote. I do not want it; I have had plenty. Article 47

of the Statute says: 'The Chamber of the Deputies has the right to accuse the Ministers of the King and to bring them to face the High Court of Justice.' I formally ask if in this Chamber, or outside, there is anyone who wants to make use of Article 47. My speech will then be very clear; it will bring about an absolute clarification. You can understand this. After having for a long time marched with comrades to whom our gratitude always will go for what they have done, it is good sense to stop to consider whether the same route with the same companions could be followed in the future.

"Gentlemen, I am the one who brings forth in this hall the accusations against me.

"It has been said that I would have founded a 'Cheka.'

"Where? When? In what way? Nobody is able to say. Russia has executed without trial from one hundred and fifty thousand to one hundred and sixty thousand people, as statistics, almost official, show. There has been a Cheka in Russia which has exercised terror systematically on all the middle classes and on the individual members of that class, a Cheka which said it was the red sword of revolution. But an Italian Cheka never had a shadow of existence.

"Nobody has ever denied that I had in my possession these three qualities: a discreet intelligence, a lot of courage and an utter contempt for the lure of money.

"If I had founded a Cheka I would have done it following the reasoning that I have always used to defend one kind of violence that never can be eliminated from history.

"I have always said, and now those who always followed me in these five years of hard struggle can remember it, that violence to be worth while in settling anything must be surgical, intelligent and chivalrous. Now, all the exploits

of any so-called Cheka have always been unintelligent, passionate and stupid.

"Can you really think that I could order—on the day following the anniversary of Christ's birth, when all saintly spirits are hovering here, can you think that I could order an assault at ten o'clock in the morning in Via Francesco Crispi, in Rome, after the most conciliatory speech that I ever made during my Government?

"Please do not thing me such an idiot. Would I have planned with the same lack of intelligence the minor assaults against Misuri and Forni? You certainly remember my speech of June 7th. It might be easy for you to go back to that week of ardent political passion when in this hall minority and majority clashed every day, so much so that some persons despaired to be able to re-establish those necessary terms for political and civil co-operation most necessary between the opposite parties at the Chamber. There were the shuttles of violent speeches flying from one side to the other. Finally, on June 6th, Delcroix broke with his lyric speech, full of life and passion, that storm-charged tension.

"The next day I spoke to clear the atmosphere. I said to the opposition, 'I recognize your ideal rights, your contingent rights. You might surpass Fascism with your experience; you may put under immediate criticism all the measures of the Fascist Government?'

"I remember, and I have still in my eyes the vision of this part of the Chamber, where all were attentive and felt that I had spoken deep, living words, and that I had stabilized the terms of that necessary living together, without which it is not possible to continue even the existence of any political assembly.

"How could I, after a success—let me say that without false or ridiculous modesty—after a success so clamorous

that it was admitted by all the Chamber, opposition included, because of which the Chamber opened again the next Wednesday in a good atmosphere, how could I think, without being struck with mad extravagance, to order, I wouldn't say a murder, but even the slightest, the most petty offence against that very adversary that I esteemed because he had a certain courage, which looked like my courage, and an obstinacy which appeared like my obstinacy in sustaining a thesis ?

" They have the minds of crickets who pretend that I was making only cynical gestures on that occasion. Such gestures are the last to be tolerated by me ; they are repugnant to the depth of my conscience. So also I feel strongly against show of strength.

" What strength ? Against whom ? With what aim ? When I think about that, Gentlemen, I remember those strategists who, during the War, while we were eating in the trenches, made strategy with little pins on the maps. But when the problem is to get something done at the place of command and responsibility, things are seen under another light and make a different appearance. And yet on enough occasions I have proved my energy. I have usually not failed to meet events.

" I have settled in six hours a revolt of the Royal Guards. In a few days I have broken an insidious revolt. In forty-eight hours I brought a division of Infantry and half of the fleet to Corfu. These gestures of energy—and the last one amazed even one of the greatest generals of a friendly Nation—are here to demonstrate that it is not energy that fails me.

" The death punishment ? But this is a joke, Gentlemen ! First of all, the death punishment must be introduced in the penal code and, anyhow, capital punishment cannot be the reprisal of a Government !

" It must be applied with a regulated, better say very regulated, judgment, when the question is the life of a citizen. It was at the end of that month which is carved deeply in my life, that I said: 'I want peace for the Italian people and I want to stabilize the normality of political life.'

" What was answered to this policy of mine? First of all the secession of the Aventino—anti-constitutional secession, clearly revolutionary! Then with a campaign of the Press which lasted during the months of June, July and August. A dirty miserable campaign which dishonoured us for three months. The most fantastic, the most terrifying, the most frightful lies were affirmed extensively in the Press.

" Investigations were also made on what happened underground; they invented things, they knew they were lying, but it was done all the same! I have always been peaceful and calm amid the storm. That storm will be remembered by those who will come after us with a sense of intimate shame. On September the 11th somebody wanted to revenge a killing, and shot one of our best men who died poor. He had sixty lires in his pocket. However, I continue in my effort to normalize. I repress illegalities. I state the bare truth when I say that even now in our jails there are hundreds and hundreds of Fascists.

" It is the bare truth when I recall that I reopened the Parliament on the fixed date and that, with not less regularity, almost all the Budgets were discussed.

" It is the bare truth that the oath you know is taken by the Militia, and that the nomination of all the generals for all the commands of zone is conducted as it is.

" Finally was presented a question which raised our passions—the question for authorization as to the resignation of Giunta. The Chamber was excited. I understood

the sense of that revolt; however, after forty-eight hours I used my prestige and my influence. To a riotous and reluctant assembly I said: 'Accept the resignation,' and the resignation was accepted.

"But this was not enough; I made a last effort to create normal conditions—the plan of the electoral reform. How was that answered? It was answered with an accentuation of the campaign and by the assertion, 'Fascism is a horde of barbarians camped on the Nation and a movement of bandits and marauders.' Now they stage, Gentlemen, the moral question! We know the sad history of moral questions in Italy.

"But after all, Sirs, what butterflies are we looking for under the arch of Titus? Well, I declare here in front of this assembly, in front of all the Italian people, that I assume, I alone, the political, moral, historical responsibility about everything that has happened. If sentences, more or less maimed, are enough to hang a man, out with the noose! If Fascism has only been castor-oil or club, and not a proud passion of the best Italian youth, the blame is on me!

"If Fascism has been a criminal association, if all the violences have been the result of a determined historical, political, moral delinquency, the responsibility of this is on me, because I have created it with my propaganda from the time of our intervention in the War to this moment.

"In these last days not only the Fascists but many citizens ask themselves: Is there a Government? Have these men a dignity as men? Have they dignity also as Government? I have wanted to reach this determined extreme point. My experience of the life of these six months is rich. I have tried the Fascist Party. As to try the temper of some metals it is necessary to hit them with a hammer, so I have felt the temper of certain men. I have seen their

value, or for what reasons at some moment when the wind seems contrary, they turn around the corner. I have tested myself. And be sure that I would not have persisted in measures if they had not been for the interests of the Nation. A people does not respect a Government which allows itself to be scorned. The people want to see reflected their own dignity in a Government, and the people, even before I said it, said, ' Enough ! The measure is filled ! '

" And why was it filled ? Because the revolt of the Aventino has a republican background.

" This sedition of the Aventino has had consequences, because now in Italy whoever is a Fascist risks his life ! In the two months of November and December eleven Fascists were killed. One had his head crushed, and another, an old man seventy-three years old, was killed and thrown from a high wall. Three fires happened in one month, three mysterious fires on the railroads, one in Rome, the other in Parma and the third one in Florence. Then came a subversive movement everywhere.

" A chief of a squad of the Militia severely wounded by subversives.

" A fight between Carabinieri and subversives in Genzano.

" An attempted attack against the seat of the Fascists in Tarquinia.

" A man wounded by subversives in Verona.

" A soldier of the Militia wounded in the Province of Cremona.

" Fascists wounded by subversives in Forli.

" Communist ambush in San Giorgio di Pesaro.

" Subversives who sing the ' Red Flag ' and attack Fascists in Monzambano.

" In the three days of this January 1925, and in only one zone, there happened incidents in Mestre, Pionca, Valombra ; fifty subversives armed with rifles stroll through



FASCIST BOY SCOUTS  GNOR MUSSOLINI WITH  CE OF PIEDMONT
AND SIGNOR GIACOMI  FRED THE FAMOUS FA  HER SECRETARY

the country singing the 'Red Flag' and explode petards. In Venice the Militiaman Pascai Mario was attacked and wounded. In Cavaso di Treviso another Fascist was hurt. In Crespano, the headquarters of the Carabinieri were invaded by about twenty frantic women, a chief of a detachment of Militia attacked and thrown into the water. In Favara di Venezia Fascists attacked by subversives.

"I bring your attention to these matters because they are symptoms. The express train No. 192 was stoned by subversives who broke the windows.

"In Moduno di Livenza a chief of the squad was attacked and beaten. You can see by this situation that the sedition of the Aventino has had deep repercussion in the whole Country. And then comes the struggle in which one says: Enough! When two elements are struggling the solution lies in the measure of strength. There never was any other solution in history, and never will be.

"Now I dare to say that the problem will be solved. Fascism, the Government, the Party is in full efficiency. Gentlemen, you have deceived yourselves! You thought that Fascism was ended because I was restraining it, that the Party was dead because I was holding it back. If I should use a hundredth part of the energy that I used to compress the Fascists, to loosen them. Oh! You should see, for them . . .

"But there will be no need of that, because the Government is strong enough to break fully and finally this revolt of the Aventino.

"Italy, Gentlemen, wants peace, wants quiet, wants labour, wants calm; we will give it with love, if that be possible, or with strength if that be necessary.

"You can be sure that in the forty-eight hours following this speech the situation will be clarified in every corner. We all know that it is not a personal fancy, not lust of

Government, not base passion, but only infinite and powerful love for my Country."

These words restrained till then, together with my disdain and my force of expression, awoke suddenly Fascist Italy. The situation, as I had foreseen, was clarified in forty-eight hours. The papers of the opposition —that till then had been full of envy, hate and defamatory attacks—began to slink into their holes again. A new situation full of power and responsibility was developing. Fascism had now all the attributes—after the long *quartarellista* parenthesis—to be able to march onward and to govern by itself.

It was on that occasion that the Liberal Ministers, Sarrocchi and Casati, and also the Minister Oviglio, a tepid Fascist, asked to resign from the Ministry. I replaced them with three Fascist Ministers. We were coming back by the strength of the events to the historical origins of our movement, to pure irreconciliableness.

Fascism, after my words full of my faith and my willingness to have audacity, was coming back to its warrior soul. Immediately all who were out of Fascism wanted to participate in our movement; but not to load too much on our Party the membership lists were closed.

Victory was complete. The manœuvre of the former premiers definitely failed and became ridiculous, just as did other artificial structures attempted about that time. One was a movement inspired by Benelli, under the name of the Italian League, to create secessions from Fascism, and another an underhand manœuvre of some short-weight grandchildren of Garibaldi.

At the end of January 1925 the Aventino with all our opponents appeared destroyed, torn to pieces by a thousand internal discords and differences. I was winner again on the

whole front, and I was getting ready to channel the Fascist revolution into institutions and into constitutional forms.

On October 28th, 1924, the National Militia, which represents the best of Fascism and which has always been my beloved creation, had sworn loyalty to the King. Now it was necessary to bring up to date the Constitution of 1848, and to create new representative institutions, worthy of the new Italy.

With this aim I brought about the nomination of a Commission of eighteen experts on statecraft. I charged them with the preparation of proposals of reforms to be presented to our legislative organs.

The Commission was then called Commission of the Solons. It concluded its works, after a certain time, suggesting some improvements for the old Constitution and the creation of new institutions. I afterwards used the proposed recommendations as a base. The Commission at the time did not lay down the definite lines, but it contributed to the reforms that later on I began to see growing clearer and which were approved by the two branches of the National Parliament.

A law against secret societies was voted; so was given legal sanction to the struggle maintained by Fascism against Masonry. In fact, in 1925, it was ridiculous to think that there could exist societies authorized to perform a clandestine public action, outside the control of the person who has the supreme direction of public affairs and beyond the control of all who fulfil any function of the law.

A secret political society in modern, contemporary life is a piece of nonsense, when it is not a menace. I settled it that all associations should be known in their aims, in their formations, membership and developments.

It was at that time that Federzoni, then Minister of the Interior, prepared with my full approval the new law on

Public Safety. Then we entrusted the Communes to the *Podesta,* drawing them away from the old electoral patronages, which were not convenient any longer to our time and our temper. The Governorship of Rome was instituted and there began, because I had so made up my mind, an inexorable fight against the Mafia in Sicily, the bandits in Sardinia, and against some other less known forms of crime, which had humiliated entire regions.

In February 1925 I fell desperately ill. For obvious reasons, and perhaps because of exaggerated apprehension, there never was given any exact account of my condition, and of my illness. I admit that the situation was in a certain way very grave. For forty days I could not come out of the house. My enemies now put their great hope on the illusion, revived by their desire, that my end was near. The Fascisti, because of my silence and the contradictory news that circulated, were very troubled. Never, so much as then, did I understand that I was indispensable to my men, to my devoted people, to all the great streams of Italian people. I had lively, vibrating and moving manifestations of solidarity, of devotion, of goodwill. The Black Shirts roared impatiently to see me.

When finally, at the end of March on the 6th anniversary of the foundation of Fascism, I appeared healed on the balcony of Palazzo Chigi, I had in front of me all of Rome. On seeing me still thin and pale, there was deep emotion. I saluted the multitude in the name of Spring, and among other things I said, "Now will come the best!" This sentence was interpreted in a thousand senses and aroused a wave of plaudits and approbations.

The wise cures of very clever doctors, such as Professor Bastianelli and Professor Marchiafava, healed me completely. Those miserable persons who put hopes upon my illness were baffled. Nothing to me is more hateful

than a hope that an illness may end one's adversary. I am more alive and stronger than ever before. I could repeat, as I said one day, after an attempt against my life: "The bullets pass, Mussolini remains."

Another series of events which were to mark my complex and difficult life were the attempts against my life.

Zaniboni initiated the series. He was a vulgar Socialist, who received two cheques of 150,000 francs each from the Czechoslovakian Socialists to lead an anti-Fascist struggle. Naturally Zaniboni, a drug addict, used the 300,000 francs to prepare with devilish ability his attempt against me. He chose the sacred day of the commemoration of the Victory. He ambushed himself in a room of the Hotel Dragoni, just in front of Palazzo Chigi, from the balcony of which I usually review the processions which pass on the way to the altar of the Unknown Soldier to place their flowers, their vows and their homage.

Having an Austrian rifle with fine sights, the fellow could not miss his aim. Zaniboni, to avoid being suspected, dressed in the uniform of a major of the army, and got ready in the morning to accomplish his crime. He was discovered. He had been followed for a long time. A few days before, General Capello had generously given him money and advice. Masonry had made of him its ensign. But with a simultaneous action, Zaniboni, General Capello and various less important personages of the plot were arrested one hour before they planned the attempt.

So closed the first chapter.

In 1926 in the month of April, when I inaugurated the International Congress of Medicine, a crazy and megalomaniac woman, of English nationality, exalted by fanaticism, came near my motor-car and fired at close range a shot that perforated my nostrils. A centimetre of difference and the shot might have been fatal. It was, as I said, a mad,

hysterical woman, led on by elements and persons never clearly identified.

I abandoned her to her destiny by putting her beyond the frontier, where she could meditate on her failure and her folly.

Just after the occasion, before my nose was out of its dressings, I was speaking to a meeting of officials from all parts of Italy. I felt impelled to say, "If I go forward, follow me; if I recoil, kill me; if I die, avenge me."

Another attempt, which might have had grave results, was that of an Anarchist, a so-called Lucetti, who had come back from France with his soul full of hate and envy against Fascism and against me. He waited for me in the light and large Via Nomentana, in front of Porta Pia. He was able to meditate his crime in silence. He had been eight days in Rome and carried powerful bombs. Lucetti recognized my car, while I was going to Palazzo Chigi, and as soon as he saw it he hurled at me the infernal machine, which hit an angle of the car and bounced back on the ground, exploding there after I had passed. I was not wounded, but innocent people were hit and taken to the hospital.

When arrested, the miserable man could justify his crazy act only by his anti-Fascist hate. I did not give a great importance to the episode. Having to meet the English Ambassador, I went directly to Palazzo Chigi and the conversation with the foreign diplomat continued calmly enough until a great popular manifestation in the streets interrupted us. Only then the English Ambassador, somewhat amazed, learned of the attempt against my life.

The last attempt was on October 31st, 1926. It was in Bologna, after I had lived a day full of life, enthusiasm and pride.

A young Anarchist, egged on by the secret plotters, at a moment when the whole population was lined up for the

salute, came out from the ranks and fired at my car with a gun. I was sitting near the "Podesta" of Bologna, Arpinati. The shot burned my coat, but again I was quite safe. The crowd, in the meanwhile, seized by an impulse of exasperated fury, could not be restrained. It gave summary justice to the man.

Other attempts were baffled. The exasperation was now surpassing any limit. I understood it was time to stop the doleful game of the adversaries. The secret societies, the opponent Press, the deceitful political cults had only one aim; it was to hit the Chief of Fascism, so that all Fascism should be hit. All the movement that dominated Italy they believed turned on one pivot, on a name, on a lone man. All the adversaries, from the most hateful ones to the most intelligent, from the slyest ones, to the most fanatical, thought that the only way of destroying Fascism was to destroy its Chief. The population itself perceived this and demanded grave punishments for the criminals. The exasperated Fascists wanted to admonish all those who were conspiring in the darkness.

A policy of force was absolutely necessary. I took the Ministry of the Internal Affairs and I launched the laws for the defence of the Regime, laws which must constitute one essential basis of the new unified National life.

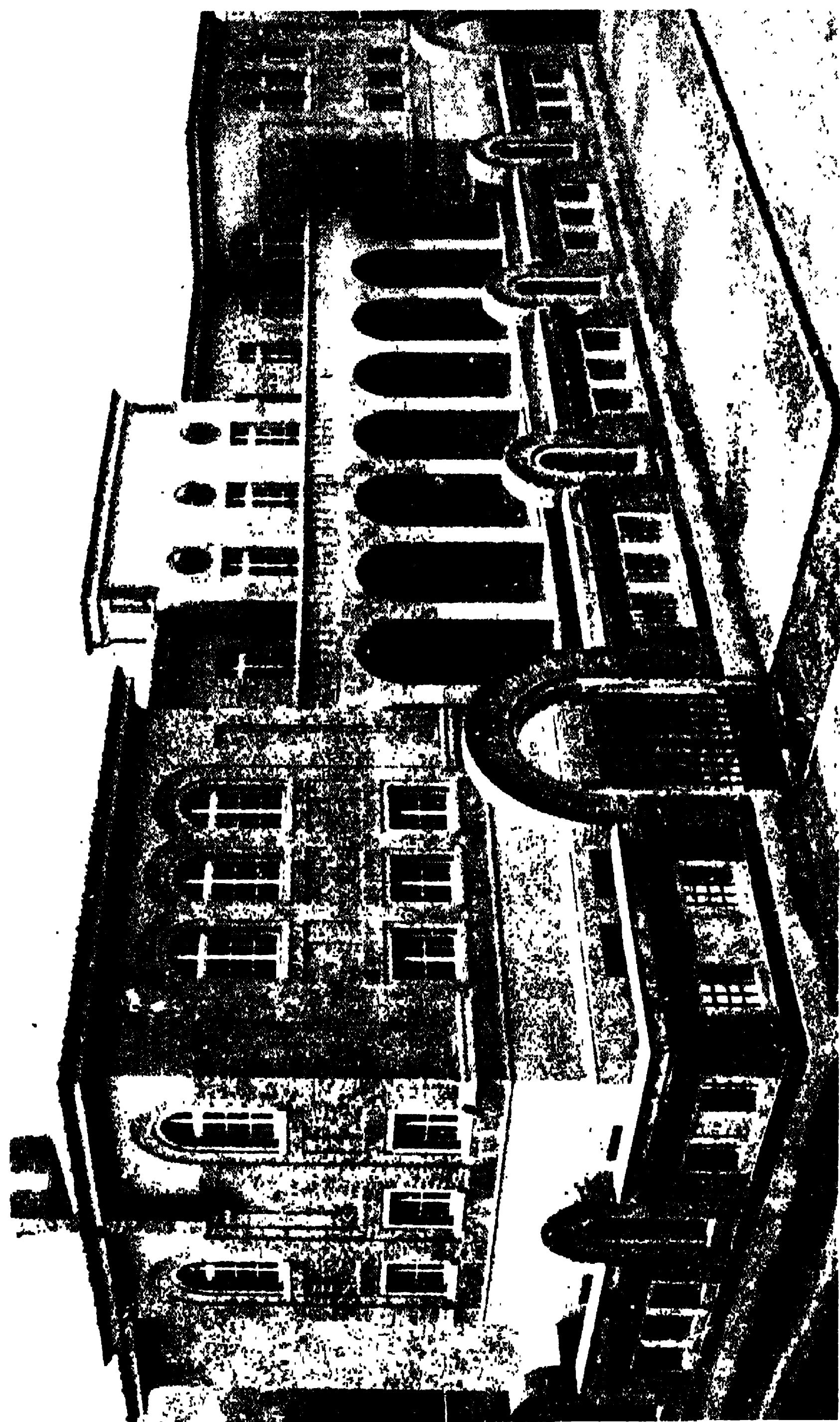
I abolished the subversive Press, whose only function was to inflame men's minds. Provincial commissions sent to confinement professional subverters. Not a day goes by that we do not feel in Italian life how much good has been brought by the measures against the forces of disintegration, disorder and disloyalty.

I must then conclude that strong policy has given really tangible results. Every day the Country feels intensely the identification of Fascism with the vital strength of the Nation. Nobody has ostracism in Italy; everybody is

allowed to live in the definite regime of law. Many elements of the old popular subversives understand now how much well-regulated life is a benefit, not only to one class, but for every class of the Italian people. Few are those who are still confined, and few are those who intend to disobey. As Minister of the Interior, I distributed a circular on January 6th, 1927, to the Prefects, in which I pointed out what must be their duty in relation to the population.

A new sense of justice, of seriousness, of harmony and concord guides now the destinies of all the peoples and classes of Italy. There are neither vexations, nor violences, but there is exaltation of what is good and of the virtue of heroism. In every class, among all citizens, nothing is done against the State, nothing is done outside the State.

Many have finally opened their eyes to this serene and severe truth ; the Italians feel themselves of one fraternity in a great work of justice. The sense of duty, the necessity of action, the style of civil life mark now an intense reawakening. The old parties are for ever dead. In Fascism politics is fused into a living moral reality ; it is a faith. It is one of those spiritual forces which renovates the history of great and enduring peoples.



# CHAPTER IX

## NEW PATHS

WHEN one sees the building of the new structures, when hammers and concrete-mixers flash and turn, the occasion is not one in which to ask the superintendent his opinion about the plays of Bernard Shaw, or to expect the architect to babble discursively on the subject of his preferences between the mountains and the seashore as summer playgrounds.

It is absurd to suppose that I and my life can be separated from that which I have been doing and am doing. The creation of the Fascist State and the passing of the hungry moments from sunrise to the deep profundity of night with its promise of another dawn avaricious for new labours, cannot be picked apart. I am lock-stitched into this fabric. It and myself are woven into one. Other men may find romance in the fluttering of the leaves on a bough; to me, whatever I might have been, destiny and myself have made me one whose eyes, ears, all senses, all thoughts, all time, all energy must be directed at the trunk of the tree of public life.

The poetry of my life has become the poetry of construction. The romance in my existence has become the romance of measures, policies and the future of a State. These, to me, are redolent with drama.

So it is that I see as I look back over nearly six years of leadership the solution of problems, each of them a chapter in my life, a chapter in the life of my Country. A chapter, long or short, simple or complex in history

of the advance and experimentation and pioneering of mankind.

I am not concerned deeply because I am misunderstood. It is more or less trivial that conspiracies go on to misinterpret and, indeed, to misrepresent in full, what I have sought and why I have sought it. After all, I have been too busy to hear the murmur of liars.

He who looks back over his shoulder toward those who lag and those who lie is a waster; it is because I cannot write my life—my daily life, my active life, my thinking life and even my own peculiar emotional life—without recording the steps I have taken to renew Italy and find a new place for her in the general march of civilization, that I call up one after another the recollections of my recent battles with measures which submerge men, with policies which bury under their simplicity and weight everything else I might have lived.

Two fields of my will and action, of my thoughts, my conclusions stand out as I write and as I record my life itself.

I think of all of them in terms of utter simplicity, stripped of complex phrases. I have seen the futility of those who speak endlessly streams of words. These words are like armies enlisted for ever to go away into the night, never to return from a campaign where the enemies are compromise with principle, cowardice, inaction, and idealism without realism.

There are those, no doubt, who regard me, or have once regarded me, as an enemy to the peace of the world. To them there is nothing to say unless to recommend to them my biography for careful reading. The record of facts is worth more than the accusation of fools.

From the first I wanted to renovate from the bottom to top the foreign policy of Italy. Let it be remembered that

I was fully conscious always of the history and the economic and spiritual possibilities of my Country in its relation to the world. Such a renovation, such a remaking of policy, was absolutely new for us. It was destined to meet serious preconceptions and misconception before it would be clearly understood and appreciated, not only by Italians, but by those responsible for the foreign policies of various nations.

I was fully aware that a new spirit, one of new austerity and dignity, imposed by me as to every large and small action of my Ministry might create the impression that I wanted to fight to a finish old international political tradition, organization, and existing alliances and the *status quo.*

What an error! To inaugurate a firm stand does not mean to revolutionize the course of international dealings. To demand a better appraisal of Italy in accordance with a correct audit of our possibilities as a powerful and prolific Nation was only to re-establish our just position.

My problem was to open the eyes of the responsible elements in the various European governments and chanceries. They had gone on rather blindly considering Italy in its unstable position after the War.

To open these eyes, sometimes with vigorous call to attention, was not always easy. I spent months and years to bring about a realization abroad that Italy's foreign policy had no tricks in it. It was always straight-going and swerved not. It was always vigilant. It was based on accurate measurement of facts, squarely faced, and it demanded equally that others should measure facts. This understanding has contributed, naturally, to bring Italy higher in the horizon of the world's eternal dawn of new events.

A speech on foreign policy pronounced by me in the Italian Senate in the spring of 1928, reviewed all our

national and international situation, and the part that Italy has had in the many little or great events of world life. It set forth a clear review of my work. It summarized the concrete success obtained by my Ministry. It brought out that we had correctly insisted upon new appraisals of Italy's part in the world.

But, before reaching this concrete and tangible result, let no one believe that the steps were light and easy. I knew, well enough, how many would look toward Rome with suspicion, as if it were an irresponsible centre of disturbance. Enemies of our Country and of Fascism tried in every way in their power to strengthen, in bad faith with twisted interpretations, and by false news, all the errors of foreign judgments of what I was trying to do.

But truth usually comes along behind any simple, clear policy and overcomes the obliquity, the conventional mentality, the spirit of opportunism, and the lie-barking of yesterdays.

There is no country in the world where foreign policy carefully carved out and approved by the nation is not subject to internal attack based on ignorance or bad faith. Therefore it was no surprise to me to find that when I had already calmed the internal political situation and had established for us the main points of the general policy of Italy within and without, there were those who began an offensive of criticism.

One of them was Count Sforza, who in October 1922 was in Paris as the Italian Ambassador.

That man, loquacious and irresponsible as a Minister in the past Governments, had been a nuisance to the Country. He had tied his name to the Adriatic situation—humiliating for our Nation. This former Minister, amateur in everything that referred to any perplexity of foreign policy, showed himself so vain that he could not feel the delicacy

of his position in Paris. When Italy were maturing events of historic character, home-sickness for lost power made him a bad servant of his own country. He eventually went to the point of trying to create difficulties for the Fascist Government in the French capital. Already political groups there were unfavourable, if not envious, to any new solidarity in Italy. Count Sforza at once began to criticize openly my declaration on foreign and internal policy, my political method and my conception of Fascist Italy. I sent him a telegram, and this is what I said :

" I must interpret as a not quite amiable and rather an awkward gesture, your decision to give your resignation before having officially known my orders as to foreign policy, which I will disclose in the Chamber of Parliament ; orders that will not be merely a sum of sentiments and resentments as you wrongly think. I bid you now formally to keep your place and not create difficulties for the Government. In this moment the Government represents the highest expression of the national conscience. I am waiting for a telegraphic answer and I reserve my later decision as to you.

" MUSSOLINI."

To this telegram Count Sforza made an elusive answer. So I called him to Rome and after some explanations, revealing our two minds in perfect antithesis, I relieved him of office and dismissed him from his place. It was time that the central authority should no longer be debated by those who occupied inferior positions. Italian political life needs command and organization and discipline. Our representatives abroad were sometimes shown to have a cold, isolated, autonomous life, far from their first duties toward their Country.

This first strong gesture of mine was a clear signal ; it

undoubtedly served as an example and admonition for many others of our diplomatic representatives, who tried to withdraw themselves, with subjective attitudes, from the supreme authority of the State.

Having closed this parenthesis of our diplomacy I dedicated all my energies to the solution of those political problems which determined our future. I found facing me a situation already distorted and prejudiced by the crass errors of preceding Governments. I found a series of peace treaties, though in some parts full of defects, nevertheless as a whole constituting an inevitable state of fact to be squarely met.

In Italy, still palpitating and open, was the wound of the Rapallo Treaty with Jugoslavia. I wanted to medicate that and heal it. On the delicate ground of treaties I explained my position and suggestions in a speech about foreign policy delivered at the Chamber, November 16th, 1922. I said then, as I always say, that " treaties, whether bad or good, must be carried out. A respectable nation can have no other programme. But treaties are neither eternal nor irreparable. They are chapters of history, not epilogues of history." Speaking of foreign policy in relation to the different groups of Powers, I summarized my thoughts with this definition: " We cannot allow ourselves either a plan of insane altruism or one of complete subservience to the plans of the other peoples.

" Ours is a policy of autonomy then. It shall be firm and severe."

In November 1922 I met at Lausanne Poincaré of France and Curzon of Great Britain. Let it be said that I re-established then and there, on my first personal contact with the Allies, our equality. There were some clear and precise interviews; some went on to a rather vivacious tune!

For the time had come when Italy should enter with

its record of sacrifice and with the weight of its history into an equality of standing in the discussions of international character, side by side with England and France.

During my brief stay at Lausanne I held conferences also with the Foreign Minister of Roumania and with Mr. Richard Washburn Child, Ambassador of the United States in Rome, and chief of the United States delegation at the Conference. I eliminated also the question of the Dodecannes.

To sum up my trip to Switzerland, these were the results :

First : we made clear to foreign diplomats the new prestige of Italy.

Second : we gave examples of our new style in foreign policy at the moment of initiating a direct contact between myself and responsible diplomats of the world.

In December of that year I made other important declarations to the Council of the Ministers about our foreign affairs. I examined again the Treaty of Rapallo. I began a solution of the problems of Fiume and Dalmatia, making that solution fit in with the situation that had been created by the preceding treaties to which I had fallen heir. For the second time I met Lord Curzon and then on to London, where I stayed for several days. On that occasion I was received by the most generous hospitality and found that I was listened to with respect by the English political world.

Already the question of the Allies' debts was on the table. I had discussed this with Mr. Child and the British Ambassador in Rome. I had a plan that I do not hesitate to claim was one of the most efficacious for the solution of that problem. My plan aroused a certain interest among the Allies, but some divergencies of a secondary character, and particularly the design of France to occupy the Ruhr, killed that which in my opinion was the most logical solution of

the debts questions, combined with the problem of the German reparations. That was a solution which might have permitted a quick and powerful renewal of world economy.

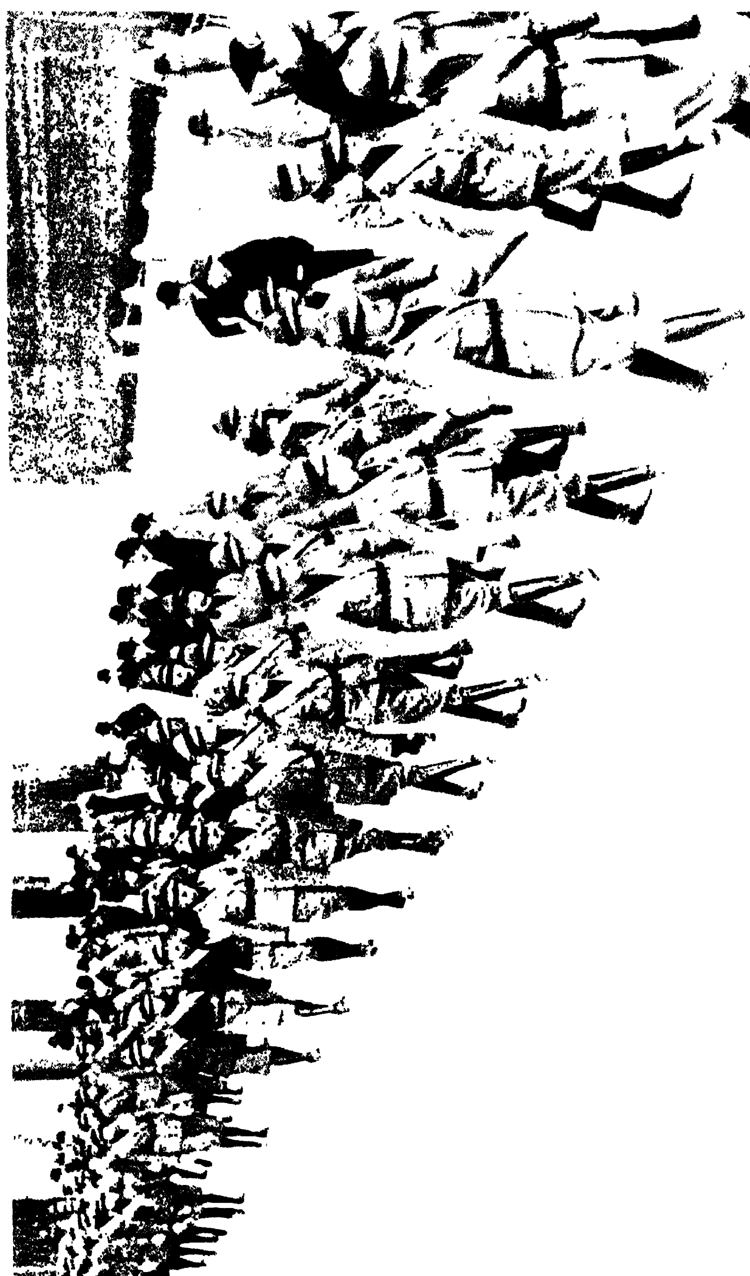
Before me always in my foreign policy is the economic aspect of international problems. That was why in 1923 I concluded a series of commercial treaties, with political background, with a number of nations. It amuses me to be called an anti-pacifist in light of our record of treaty making for peace and for smooth international dealing.

These commercial treaties were very helpful in settling our economic position. In February of 1923 I signed the Italian-Swiss Treaty, concluded in Zurich; I ratified the Washington Treaty for the limitation on the naval armaments. Other commercial treaties were concluded with Czechoslovakia, with Poland, with Spain, and, finally, with France. I took the first steps to renew commercial relations with Soviet Russia.

Our record in international affairs indicates a sleepless vigilance to build peace and make friends. More peace, more friends. We yield nothing of our autonomy, nor do we allow our power to be used as pawn by others. We are idealists in the sense that we endeavour to make and keep peace by building and maintaining, brick by brick, stone by stone, a structure of peace, founded on realities rather than on dreams and visionary plans. I have insisted upon being strong, but I have laboured to be generous.

For an efficient foreign service, the world requires some house-cleaning in its diplomatic machinery. It has grown stale and over-manned and bureaucratic and filled with feeble, petty conspiracies for place and promotion.

I began then in the reorganization of our Consulates, an elimination of foreign functionaries. That work was long and widespread, because it was necessary to rebuild our



old consular organization; this renovation, complex as were its problems, was completed with unswerving insistence.

In the midst of this complex task of foreign policy and machinery, and while I was studying the solution of the Adriatic problem, there came the news that the Italian Military Mission in Albania had been treacherously ambushed on a road and massacred in its entirety by bandits from the border. In this tragic happening there were wiped out brave General Enrico Tellini, Surgeon Major Luigi Corte, Artillery Lieutenant Mario Bonacini, and a soldier, Farneti. The Italian Military Mission was in Albania together with other foreign missions with a well-defined task, laid out by definite international agreements. The offence to Italy and to the Italian name hit the sensibilities of Italy squarely in the face. History furnishes other examples of such outrages and it points to accepted standards. I made myself the interpreter of the righteous wrath of Italians everywhere. I sent at once an ultimatum to Greece.

I demanded apologies. I demanded payment of fifty million lire as indemnity.

Greece gave us a deaf ear. Pretexts and excuses met my request. There was an attempt by Greece to find some allies to aid her to slide away from my demands. I would not play that base game. Without hesitation I sent units of our naval squadron to the Greek island of Corfu. There the Italian marines landed. At the same time I sent a note to the Powers. The League of Nations declared itself incompetent to solve and judge the incident. I continued the occupation of Corfu, declaring clearly that Italy would have withdrawn from the League if we could not obtain there a satisfactory attitude. This was not a matter of insult by words; it concerned the lives of Italian officers and soldiers. It was impossible to believe that I could

allow the turning over of this tragic page with nothing more than some bureaucratic gesture.

There has been so much misrepresentation and nonsense as to this outrage and the settlement of our demands that I may do well to state the simple facts, which any school child can understand and digest.

The case, when brought for judgment to the Conference of the Ambassadors, obtained, as was to be expected, a favourable verdict for the Italian position.

Greece gave me all the satisfaction that I had asked. The indemnity was paid. I offered ten millions of this indemnity to the Greek refugees. Thereafter, having obtained full satisfaction, I recalled the squadron from Corfu. The book was shut.

But that month was indeed one of tragic happenings. The new Fascist style of foreign policy had satisfied the sensibility of all the Italians, but I admit that it had hurt the feelings of many foreign elements which saw in my foreign policy an uncommon form, disturbing to many and preventing plans contrary to the rights of Italy. I allowed nothing to swerve me. I made important declarations to the Senate, both as to the Greek incident and on the question of Fiume. I said then that the most painful inheritance of our foreign policy was Fiume, but that, anyway, I was treating with Jugoslavia to solve, with the slightest possible damage, the very grave Adriatic situation inherited as a consequence of the Treaty of Rapallo.

The Senate approved my policies and my acts.

In January 1924 I was able, at last, to conclude with Pasic, the great Serb statesman, and with Nincic, the Jugoslav Minister, a new treaty between Italy and our neighbour. As a consequence of this treaty Fiume became Italian. Other moves, continued in 1925, brought to signature the Nettuno Conventions, which regulated all

the relations of good neighbourhood between the two States. It remains for Jugoslavia to ratify.

At the end of all this diplomatic work on a wide field we definitely lost Dalmatia, we lost cities sacred to Italy by the history and the soul of the populations which live in them. These had been assured us by the Pact of London. No better settlement was possible than the one that I, with the goodwill and the eagerness that I and Pasic and Nincic put into the negotiations, were able to draw up.

Though there is no Jugoslavian ratification of the Nettuno Conventions, our borders are well guarded and sure. Jugoslavia may show its goodwill; in any case we now calmly can look into the eyes of our troubled neighbour.

The foreign programme in 1924 obtained in the Senate three hundred and fifteen favourable votes against six and twenty-six absent. In December of that same year I had an interview with Chamberlain, new Foreign Minister of the British Empire. In the many events of international character I have always found him a friend of Italy and of Italians.

In 1925 I had to undergo a lively struggle with the Government of Afghanistan. In the capital of that distant country had been slain, as a consequence of some events of internal character, one of our countrymen, an engineer, Piperno, who had gone there to work and study. The Afghan Government refused to pay an indemnity to the family of Piperno. I had to send something of a demand. Though there was a definite claim for satisfaction, I did not close the door to resuming good friendship with a distant State, and indeed, later the King of Afghanistan, in Rome, had the warmest and most sympathetic of receptions.

The clouds come and pass away and new clouds come into our skies. A new cloud showed in the anti-Italian propaganda, laid down by Germans in the region of our Eastern

border. In February 1926, when the Fascist policy had made its justice, burden and strength felt in the mixed population zone of the High Adige, I had to speak clearly as to the problem of our relations with those Germans behind the Brenner Pass. I made two straight-from-the-shoulder speeches that shook many a timid and self-conscious plotter or sentimentalist. These are not practised in the habits of a school of courage and strength. I dismissed on that occasion another Ambassador, Bosdari, who in the centre of an event, as significant as was this, concerning deeply the relations between the Italian and the German people, was not able to behave as we might expect an Ambassador of a Power like Italy to behave.

The frank speech that I made on that occasion—it was cut from the same cloth as that I used in a similar circumstance against the policy of Seipel, Premier of Austria—undoubtedly cleared our relations with the German population behind the borders.

This question of the High Adige, however, was framed in a wide vision of our relations with all other States. It was just at that time that I had a series of important interviews with the Bulgarian, Polish, Greek, Turkish and Roumanian Foreign Ministers.

Thanks then to this intense political rhythm Rome, every day, became more and more a centre of attraction for important political activities and exchange. The loyal character of my foreign policy, followed and appreciated by all Italians, has given Italy more consideration from other nations. Loyal policy is the one which scores the greatest success. Ambiguities and vagueness are not of my temperament, and consequently they are strangers to any policy of mine. I feel that I can speak with firmness and dignity, because I have behind me a people which, having

fulfilled the duties, now have sacred rights to defend and for which to demand respect.

I have sent forth messages of brotherhood and faith to the Italians who live beyond our borders ; I did not give them the name of immigrants, because in the past this word has had a humiliating meaning, and it seemed in some way to designate an inferior category of men and women. I have been able, I am glad to say, to protect my countrymen without hurting the susceptibilities of other peoples. This protection is founded on international law and good sense in all exchanges between nations.

Italy on its part has conceded the greatest hospitality to all those who for business, for religious faith, for pleasure, or even for curiosity have wanted to visit our soil. I have taught Italians to respect appropriately foreign representatives in our country ; it is never admissible, in fact, that diplomatic controversies can be twisted or troubled by angry popular demonstrations against embassies or consulates. Such disorders belong to an old democratic habit which Facism has clearly outgrown. There have been delicate moments in Italian affairs during which resentment and protests might easily have been exhibited. I have always held these protests within the limits of Fascist dignity, though often they have been exaggerated in the foreign Press. This is no little task, even for one who has imposed upon himself the task of giving order and discipline to the Italian people.

The foreign policy of Italy, directed by me, has been simple, understandable, and rests on these main points :

First, mine is a policy of peace. It is founded not upon words, gestures, and mere paper transactions, but comes from an elevated national prestige and from a whole network of agreements and treaties which cement harmony between peoples.

Secondly, I have not made any specific alliances with the Great Powers. Instead, I have negotiated a series of treaties which show a clear and decisive will to assure to Italy a prosperity in its relations with all nations, especially with those of great historical importance such as England.

Nor have I failed to work out a whole series of treaties with minor Powers, so that Italian influence could have its part in general progress. Albania is one case. Hungary and Turkey are others. To assure harmony on the Mediterranean I have established accords with Spain; to make possible a greater development of our industries and of our foreign trade, I resumed independent commercial relations with Russia.

Stupid indeed are those who fail to see that I have taken a serene, respectful attitude, but not a humble one. The League of Nations and some of the diplomacy inspired by the Locarno Treaty are witnesses of that. I made reservations, after meditated discussions, and because of my grounded beliefs as to the pacts of disarmament, I noticed some absurdities in them.

I have bettered and completed the Consular organization, and I have put in it a series of new elements born and grown with Fascism. They have suffered the passion of the War and the passion of our rebirth. In the meantime I did not fail to bring Fascism also to our Colonies; I wanted to extend the standards which demanded discipline and insured full harmony for all Italian initiatives. These must be concentrated from now on in the representative of our policies.

A sense of new life and pride fills not only the Italians in Italy, but all our countrymen scattered about the world. Italy now enjoys the respect of those nations which evolve and put into effect world policy.

My Colonial policy has simple affinity with my foreign

policy. Even taking into consideration the virtues of our colonizing peoples, even remembering all the fine human material we have given for the development of entire regions of the African and American worlds, before the War and after, we had failed to realize the potential possibilities for our colonial programme. We had failed to bring it to vigour and fruitfulness.

We missed then that legitimate satisfaction which should have come to us from right and from duty fulfilled during and after the War.

Colonial development would not have been for us merely a logical consequence of our population problem, but would have constituted a formula of solution for our economic situation. Even now, at this distance of ten years from the War, this situation has to find its full solution. Our colonies are few, and not all open to extensive improvement. Eritrea, which is the first of our colonies, has not had any change. Somaliland has been augmented by British Giubaland, following a diplomatic accord.

Lately, thanks to the wise policies of Governor De Vecchi, we have pacified all Somaliland, and considerable Italian capital is moving toward that colony of ours, to be used in definite objects and to give work to Italian labour. The Libian colony—which includes Cirenaica and Tripolitania—was reduced during the War to the occupation of the coast and some of the principal cities. Fascism, assuming the power, found grave conditions. These also have been cleared up. Our policy of military occupation, and of course of economic penetration, has assured us the full and uncontested domination of Cirenaica as far as Giarabub, and of Tripolitania as far as the border recognized by treaties of international character.

There is a great fervour of rebirth in both colonies. Tripoli has become one of the most beautiful Mediterranean

cities. A congress of medical men has called it a health resort. We have found water for the city and water in the hills for irrigation. I made a visit to the zone of Tripoli, and that gave me the conviction as to all the possibilities for improvement that can be given the entire colony. There are zones in Garian which can compete in production and fertility with the better zones of Southern Italy. The same can be said about the high plane of Cirenaica. In this last region I have abolished a curious form of Parliament created by the weakness of our former Governments. Now the Governors enjoy complete influence and a responsibility for the welfare of nations and Italians. These regions are pacified. Immigration continues to go there. Capital goes: labourers go.

These two colonies alone cannot solve our population problem. Mark this well. But with goodwill and with the typical colonizing qualities of Italians, we can give value to two regions which were owned by Rome and which must grow to the greatness of their past and contribute to the new and great expanding possibilities of our general economic progress.

Into these labours to rebuild Italy's peaceful position before the world, and to develop as duty dictates every colonial possibility which may help to solve our population problems, I have put my days and some of my sleepless nights.

But it would be absurd to suppose that life was quite as easy for me as to allow me to stop with international and colonial questions.

Let us turn to the amazing and dramatic financial situation.

A leader of the Liberal Party in Parliament, Peano, six months before the march on Rome, had defined the deficit of our Budget by a figure of more than six billions!

The financial situation was then, according even to the declaration of our opponents, desperately serious. I knew what a difficult inheritance I had received. It had come down to me as a legacy from the errors and weaknesses of those who had preceded me. I well understood, in fact, that with such an important leak in the hull of the ship of State, any great voyage of progress would have been impossible. Finance was, then, one of the most delicate and urgent problems to be solved, if I wanted to rebuild and elevate our credit abroad and at home.

There were many demands due and waiting; the necessity of turning the printing-presses to the production of new paper-money had been evoked to drive down and down the value of Italian currency. An irresponsible and demagogic policy had been followed which brought about complex makeshifts. These not only altered the soundness of the Budget, but also were undermining all our economic life and the whole efficiency of the State.

I had to give a smashing blow to useless expenditures, and to those who sought tribute from the Treasury. I had to rake up tax-slackers. I had to establish severest economy in every branch of State administration. I had to put a brake on the endless increase of employees. Furthermore, the obligation of settling our debts with Foreign Powers was staring me in the face. Even if our resource was limited, this supreme act of wisdom and honesty had to be performed.

It goes without discussion that, for the States as for individual citizens, when a debt had been signed and acknowledged it has to be paid, and faith has to be kept as to undertaken obligations.

For this work I picked a capable man; I appointed as Minister of Finance the Honourable De Stefani, a Fascist and a Doctor in Political Economy. He was able to curtail expenses, repress abuses, and create new sources of

revenue and taxes; in this way the Budget was almost balanced within two years.

I demobilized all the economic organization left over from War time; I eliminated the useless bureaucracy of the new Provinces, still burdened by the debts and indemnities of War. I settled all these with an issue of bonds quickly subscribed.

Before starting a policy of severe economy, I wanted to do full justice to the invalids of the War. I fixed, with special privileges and without economy, the obligations that the State was to assume in their favour and in favour of the orphans and widows of those who died in battle. After having repaired in this way a cruel wrong, and fulfilled a duty towards those who had given their life and their blood to the Country, it was easy for me to strike at certain forms of exaggerated and sudden richness derived from war profits. There is no doubt that I have been very harsh in this matter. But why not? These unjust pocket-book advantages represented an offence to those who for the War had suffered, not only in misery or death, but also in money and property losses.

While acting in a way to eliminate all that burdened the economy and finance of State, I tried to promote individual production to the greatest degree. I had to respect honestly accumulated wealth, and make everybody understand the value, not only economic but also moral, of inheritance transmittable in families. Because of this, though I had approved a tax reform of great importance, I restored many basic rights, such as the right of succession.

It was made clear that I would never approve subjecting inheritance to a taxation which had almost assumed a Socialistic character of expropriation. Interference with succession strikes a blow at the institution of the family.

I aroused controversies, but, at last, my decision was understood and accepted by the people.

Who knows better than I that the discipline of the Italian people has been worthy of my admiration and the respect of the world? We have no great natural resources. Nevertheless our citizens subjected themselves to a taxation pressure in such a way that towards the end of 1924 Minister De Stefani was able not only to announce to the Chamber the balancing of our Budget, but also to foresee a surplus of one hundred and seventy millions for the fiscal year 1925–26.

I consider the corner-stone of all Governmental policies is a wise and strong financial policy. So now, supported by the soundness of the Budget, this was an accomplished fact. The State, by its ability and the disciplined patience of Italian taxpayers, was able to face all its obligations, to liquidate its liabilities and, in 1925 and 1926, to discuss with Washington and London the complex problems of War debts.

We were out of the hole.

We did not stop with the Central Government.

The State, self-assured, with its finances reordered, now by the strength of its example, was able to give precise rules for restoration of the finance of the self-governing units in Communes and Provinces.

But even that was not enough; we had to review the financial position of many a corporation or industry. Generally this included all those industries which were quoted on the Stock Exchange.

By one of those phenomena of national and international speculations, which are not infrequent in modern life, many stocks of our industries, and even Government Bonds, had risen to figures which were hyperbolical and inconceivable if one considered the relation that should exist between

the value of our lira and its purchasing power in regard to gold.

Even in Italy, a wise and honest country, in which excessive speculation was never rampant, and the Stock Exchange was never the object of excessive and unchecked interest from any class of citizens, there arose a madness for Stock Exchange gambling. Many people, naturally, broke their own heads. They shattered patrimonies, caused scandals, provoked bankruptcies; but this was not sufficient to stop the sudden craze for speculation. The Minister of Finance then decided to take steps to watch and to limit the activities of the exchanges. It was necessary to take really serious measures. These, of course, would run counter to old and rooted business traditions. Perhaps they were too sudden and too unexpected. They caused in the middle and financial class an opposition which created disturbance in all markets.

I was following the course of these events. This sudden opposition created by economical and not by political causes might, as was shown afterwards, become a real danger, but it gave to me a very important field for experiences and observations. I brought about a counter-offensive and tamed those who made the attacks. A more rational policy was instituted, but we conceded nothing to the speculators. After a while De Stefani resigned. Volpi succeeded him. In the meantime, after this first difficulty had been dealt with, I concentrated my attention on the War Debts.

After settling the State Budget and balancing it, I knew that I had come to the task of making an agreement with the United States of America and with England on the reduction of our War Debt. I sent a delegation to Washington. The leaders were Count Volpi and the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Grandi. I feel that the



negotiations were made with great ability. We arrived, I believe, at an agreement that satisfied the American public and safeguarded the interests of Italy.

On January 27th, 1926, by an analogous agreement, with slight modifications, due to the different relations that existed between us and England, we were able to settle also our English debts. America and England ratified the agreements; and so did we, proud of it, because it is a constant hard rule, in all our private or public affairs, to keep our faith to our given word and pay to our full ability the last cent we owe without wailing or complaint.

Then came a gesture of spontaneous national patriotism; our people by public subscription and without the help of the State paid the first instalment due to the Government of the United States!

I believe that the safety of the Budget and the agreements of Washington and London would be sufficient elements to reassure our industrial, commercial and banking class as to the soundness of the financial policy of the Government. I hoped that it would lead to a gradual re-valuation of all our currency and credit in national and international markets.

Unfortunately, all which appeared to me as originated by convincing logic, did not follow. In the first semester of 1926 we were losing an average of ten points in relation to the pound. The pound sterling was towing naturally all the other privileged currencies in such a way that, while our credit should have been on the up grade, we were witnessing the opposite phenomenon. Our private economic life was getting thinner and lighter; it was becoming fickle and inconstant, through gradual inflation, which might delude many industrial centres of Northern Italy, but was certainly not satisfying to the middle class and the Italians who saved money.

It was necessary to give a point of support to this gay finance. It was inconceivable that an orderly, quiet, disciplined State, which had no public agitation as a liability and worked with tenacity, faith and pride, should abandon these wholesome forces and assets to the mercy of shark speculators and parasites, eager to enrich themselves on the depreciation of the lira; ready to accept willingly or even quicken a general bankruptcy so as not to be obliged to settle their private debts, or to face their obligations towards depositors in their banks. A betrayal of the Italian people was being plotted by a class of unworthy citizens. It was a serious betrayal and an injury of moral character, because a ruined people cannot readily be born again in the credit of the world.

I studied for a long time the complex phenomenon of State, private and individual finance. I was making comparison between our own economic phase and the situation of analogous countries. I was watching closely the statistical data of our commercial balance. I had in my hand all the elements for a sure and positive judgment, and was ready to say the word which would influence in a clear and decisive way the economic life of Italy.

Thus it happened that in August 1926, in a square of a beautiful town of central Italy, at Pesaro, I made a speech which was to become famous and was destined to mark the beginning of the re-valuation of the lira and our starting-point towards a gold basis.

I had decided for some time to speak out with candour to the Italian people. Foreign exchange had revealed a weakness of our credit abroad. Instability every day, under a regime of giddy and disastrous finance, was a sign of underground work. I had to put speculation with its back to the wall with a slam. I had to face and defeat that part of a certain class who would have pushed the nation

towards bankruptcy. The Government could not ignore them or their machinations. It was not only a matter touching the financial future of the Country; the very flag of the Italian people was being jeopardized. In fact, in certain situations, even the soundness of a currency can arise to the dignity of a flag and has to be defended by every means open. One cannot entrench himself behind ignorance, when the patrimony and the dignity of an entire people is being threatened.

Fascism, which had put discipline into the nation, had to put its firm hand on that class of shortsighted speculators who wanted to bring to nothing the value of our currency. Fascism, winning on the political line now faced, as I could see; a defeat, if it did not intervene energetically in the financial field.

In this plot against us were joined all the strength of the international anti-Fascists, pushed and aroused by our eternal foes, inside Italy and out. I understood that, with this problem of honesty and rectitude, there was also a problem of will. So I spoke. Here is the essence of my speech:

"You must not be surprised if I make a political declaration of definite importance. It is not the first time that I have addressed to the people directly, without any official apparatus, my convictions and my decisions. I must always be trusted, but especially when I am speaking to the people, looking into its eyes and listening to the beating of its heart. I am speaking to you, but in this moment I am speaking to all Italians and my voice, for obvious reasons, will certainly have an echo behind the Alps and the Overseas. Let me tell you that I will defend the Italian lira to the last sigh! I will never give the marvellous Italian people, which for four years has worked with ascetic discipline, and is ready for other and harder sacrifices,

the moral shame and economic catastrophe of the bankruptcy of the lira.

"The Fascist regime will resist with all its strength the attempts to suffocate Italy made by adversary financial forces. We will squash them as soon as they are identified at home. The lira, which is the sign of our economic life, the symbol of our long sacrifices and of our tenacious work, will be defended and it will be firmly defended—and at any cost! When I go among a people that really work, I feel that in speaking this way I interpret sincerely its sentiment, its hopes, and its will.

"Citizens and Black Shirts! I have already said the most important part of my speech, destined to dissipate the fogs of uncertainty and to weaken the eventual attempts of troublesome defeat."

My sentences were as whip-lashes for all the speculators hidden in the Bourses. The great financial institutions understood that it was not possible to adopt independent policies without having to reckon with the Government. Speculators perceived they had fallen into a trap.

On the other hand, I did not want to confine myself to words. In the Council of the Ministers of September 1, I adopted measures which were to guarantee my financial policies. These measures can be summed up: transportation of the Morgan loan of ninety millions of dollars to the Bank of Italy; regularization of the accounts between the State and the Bank of Italy; reduction of two billions and five hundred millions of the circulation on account of the State; liquidation of the autonomistic section of the Consorzio Valori.

To all this there was to be added a broad simplification of taxation with some abolition of taxes and a new form of protection for thrift and banking activities.

In November I floated a loan that I called "The

Littorio." It was intended to facilitate cash operations and to give some elasticity to the Budget. Since there was a very heavy floating debt, represented by Treasury Bonds, I decided upon redemption of these bonds and their inscription in the great book of the public debt. These provisions had without doubt a harsh character; they were full of sacrifice. But when the moment, and the discomfort had passed, we could start on a policy of wise severity, our lira began to climb gradually on the markets of London and Washington; and our credit again rose in every part of the world.

To be sure, the passage from giddy to an austere finance which I had inaugurated with the Pesare speech was not without difficulty. Failures and heavy losses were brought on. Business deals begun while the lira was at one hundred and thirty to the pound were closed with the lira at ninety. All this brought with it unavoidable losses which hit hardest those least strong and resistant financially.

The difficulties in returning to a position of financial dignity and austerity were notable; reconstruction was as difficult as inflation had been easy.

We had to reduce the Budget and State bonds to their simplest expression; we had to start a policy of demobilization of our debts to be able to know our complex financial burden and know exactly the interest that had to be paid every year.

But the situation had been cleared and bettered. To be able to have a sounder, readier, more agile organization, I had decided on the unification of all the institutions issuing paper money. Only the Bank of Italy has the power to issue paper money; the Bank of Naples and the Bank of Sicily returned to their first functions of guardians and stimulators of the agricultural economic life of Southern Italy.

When, after a year of notable difficulties, the financial situation of the Budget and of the Italian economy had been cleared, I was able to direct myself, in 1927, toward the new gold basis of the lira, on concrete foundations. In December 1927, at a meeting of the Council of Ministers, I was able to announce to the Italian people that the lira was back on a gold basis, on a ratio which technicians and profound experts of financial questions have judged sound.

I felt the pride of a victor. I had not only led the Black Shirts and political forces, but I had dominated a complex and difficult problem of national finance which subtracts itself sometimes from the will and the influence of any political man and becomes subjected to the tyranny and mechanism of mere material relations under the influence of various and infinite factors. Only a profound knowledge of the economic life and structure of a people in such an insidious field can reach conclusions which will be able to satisfy the great majority.

To-day we have a balanced Budget. Self-ruling units, the Provinces and the Communes, have balanced their budgets, too. Exports and imports and their relationship are carried under a precise and definite rhythm—that of our stabilized lira. Through solidity and certainty Fascist Italy is creating a new Italian regime, while the necessary complement of our general policy and the essence of our State organization is being completed by a new corporative system.

# CHAPTER X

## THE FASCIST STATE AND THE FUTURE

AMID the innovations and experiments of the new Fascist civilization, one interests the whole world; it is the corporative organization of the State.

Let me assert at once that before reaching this form of State organization, that I now consider rounded out, the steps taken have been long, the research, analysis and discussion have been exhaustive. Experience and tests have been full of lessons.

Practical reality itself has been the navigator. First of all, we must remember that the corporative organization is not born from a desire to create merely juridical institutions; in my opinion, it arose from special necessities of the Italian situation in particular, and in general of any situation where there is economic restriction, and where traditions of work and production are not yet developed by experience and time. Italy, in its first half of a century of united political renaissance, has seen classes, one armed against the other, not only by a desire to overcome the other in political control, but also in the struggle for the limited resources that our surface soil and what was beneath it might put at the disposition of those who were interested in work and production.

Opposed to a directing middle-class there was another class which I will call, for more easy reference, proletarian. It was influenced by Socialists and Anarchists, in eternal and never-ending struggle with the directing class.

Every year there was a general strike; every year the fertile Po Valley, for instance, was subject to periodical agitations, which imperilled crops and all production. Against the humane sense of harmony, which should be a duty among citizens of the same Fatherland, there was a chronic struggle of interests, egged on by the professional Socialists, the syndicalist organizers, against a middle-class that persisted in its position of negation and messianic expectation. Civil life did not move a step forward on the way of decisive betterment.

A country like ours, which has no rich resources in the earth, which has a half of its area represented by mountains, cannot have great economic possibilities. If, then, the citizens become naturally quarrelsome, if classes have a tendency to contend in order to annihilate each other, civil life has none of that rhythm necessary to develop a modern people. The Liberal and Democratic state, in face of upsettings, recurrent every year, and even at every season, kept itself on an agnostic ground, selecting a characteristic slogan: "Neither reaction, nor revolution," as if this sentence had a precise, or indeed even any meaning whatever.

It was necessary to emerge from a base caddish habit of the competition of class, and to put aside hates and ires. After the War, especially with the subversive propaganda of Lenin, ill will had reached perilous proportions. Usually agitations and strikes were accompanied by fights, and there were dead and wounded men. The people went back to work with souls full of hate against the class of the masters which, right or wrong, was considered so idiotically lacking in vision that it surpassed in this regard any other middle class in the world. Between the peasants and the rising industry of urban centres there was also a phenomenon of noticeable misunderstanding. All our life was dominated

by demagogy. Everyone was disposed to tolerate, to pretend to understand, to grant something to the violence of the crowd. But after every incident of disorder a new situation promised another and more difficult problem of conflict.

It was necessary, in my opinion, to create a political atmosphere, which would allow men in government to have some manner of courage, to speak harsh truths, to affirm rights, only after having exacted duties, and to impose, if it was necessary, these duties. Liberalism and Democracy were only attempted remedies of milk-and-water character ; they exhausted their energies in the halls of parliaments. Leading that agitation were employees of the State, railroad men and postmen and troublesome elements. The authority of the State was a kitten handled to death. In such a situation, mere pity and tolerance would have been criminal. Liberalism and Democracy, which had abdicated their duty at every turn, utterly failed to appraise and adjust the rights and duties of the various classes in Italian life. Fascism has done it !

The fact is that five years of harmonious work have transformed in its essential lines the economic life, and in consequence the political and moral life of Italy. Let me add that the discipline that I imposed is not a forced discipline, it is not born from preconceived ideas, does not obey the selfish interests of categories and of classes. Our discipline has one vision and one end, the welfare and the good name of the Italian nation.

The discipline that I have imposed is enlightened discipline. The humble classes, because they are more numerous and perhaps deserve more solicitude, are nearest to my heart of responsible leader. I have seen the men from the countryside in the trenches and I have understood how much the Nation owes to the healthy people of calloused

hand. On the other hand, our industrial workers have their typical character of sobriety, geniality, resistance, which feeds the pride of one who must rule and lead a people. The middle Italian class, too, including the rural, is much better than its reputation. Our problems arise from the variety and diversities among various economic interests, which does make difficult the formation of great national categories of producers. However, none of the producing Italian categories can be rated as " vampires," as they were rated in the superficial terminology of the old Socialist demagogy. The State is no longer an agnostic when it confronts facts and interests of the various classes. Not only does it abolish struggle, but tries to find out the origin of clash and conflicts. By statistics and the help of studious men, we now are able to give a definition of what will be the great issues of to-morrow. In the meantime, with the intervention, not only of the Government, but of the consultative bodies locally organized, we can know precisely what are to be the outlines of the productive programmes of to-morrow.

I have wanted the Fascist Government above all to take good care of the social legislation needed to carry out our part of agreed international programmes for industry and for those who bear the future of industry. I think that Italy is advanced beyond all the European nations : in fact, it has ratified the laws for the eight hour day, for obligatory insurance, for regulation of the work of women and children, for assistance and benefit, for after-work diversion and adult education, and finally for obligatory insurance against tuberculosis. All this shows how, in every detail in the world of Labour, I stand by Italian working classes. All that was possible to do without doing an injury to the principle of solidity in our economy I have set out to do, from the minimum wage, to continuity of employment ;

from the insurance against accidents, to the indemnity against illness; from income for old age, to the proper regulation of military service. There is little which social welfare studies have appraised as practical to national economy or as wise for social happiness which has not already been advanced by me. I want to give to every man and woman so generous an opportunity that work will be done, not as a pain, but as a joy of life. But even such a complex programme cannot be said to equal the creation of corporativism. Nor can corporativism equal something even larger. Beyond the corporativism, beyond the State's labours, is Fascism, harmonizer and dominator of the Italian life, standing as the inspiration.

In 1923, some months after the march on Rome, I insisted on the ratification of the law for an eight hour day. All the masses which had seen in the legislative policy of Fascism a friend, gave their approval to national syndicalism. Instead of the old professional syndicates we substituted Fascist corporations. In a meeting of December 19, 1923, I had occasion to affirm that: "Peace within is primarily a task of Government. The Government has a clear outline of conduct. Public order must never be troubled for any reason whatsoever. That is the political side. But there is also the economic side; it is one of collaboration. There are other problems, such as the one of exportation. I remind Italian industry of these principles. Until now it has been too individualistic. The old system and old ways must be abandoned."

A little further on I said: "Over all conflicts of human and legitimate interests there is the authority of the Government, the Government alone is in the right position to see things under the aspect of the general welfare. This Government is not at the disposition of this man or those men, it is over everybody, because it takes to itself not only the

juridical conscience of the Nation in the present, but also all that the Nation represents for the future. The Government has shown that it values at the highest the productive strength of the nation. A Government which follows these principles has the right to be listened to by everyone. It has a task to fulfil. It will do it. It will do it inexorably for the defence of the moral and material interests of the Nation."

There were abandoned, little by little, the old Labour structure and associations. We were directed more and more towards the corporative conception of the State. I did not want to take away from Labour one of its holidays, and I fixed, instead of the first of May, which had foreign origins, and a print of Socialist internationalism, a gay and glorious date in Italian life—April 21, the birthday of Rome. Rome is a city which has given legislation to the world. The Roman Law is still the text which rules the relations of civil life. To celebrate a Labour Day, I could not have selected a more suggestive and worthy date.

To bring into reality in a precise co-ordination all the provisions that I undertook and that Fascism and the Corporations had brought about in all their complexity, I made the Great Council approve a document. I do not hesitate to declare it of historical character: it is the Labour Charter.

It is composed of thirty paragraphs, each of them containing a fundamental truth. From the presupposition of production—necessity above all for production—arises the need of an equitable share of products, for the requirement of the judgment of Tribunals in case of discord and, finally, protective legislation.

That document has been welcomed by all Italian classes. The Labour Magistrature represents, in its consecration to duty, something worthy of a strong State, in contrast to



INAUGURATING THE RECENTLY ERECTED *CASA DEL FASCIO* AT SIGNA
FASCISTS WEARING ROMAN COSTUME GROUPED AT THE ENTRANCE

the cloudy aspirations in the misty realms of high-sounding Liberalism, Democracy, and Communistic fantasy. The framing and realization were the tasks of Fascism. Old men of the Socialist and syndical poses and postures, seeing the daring new reform, were amazed and perplexed. Another legend fell down; Fascism was not the protector of any class whatsoever, but a supreme regulator of the relations between all citizens of a State. The Labour Chart found interpreters and attracted the attention of the studious in every part of the world. It became a formidable pillar of the new constitution of the Fascist State.

As a logical consequence of the Charter of Labour and of all the social legislation and of the Magistrature of Labour, came the necessity of instituting the corporations. In this institution there are concentrated all the branches of national production. Work in all its complex manifestations and in its breadth, both as to manual and as to intellectual work, requires equal protection and nourishment. The citizen in the Fascist State is no longer a selfish individual, to whom is given the anti-social right of rebelling against any law of the Collectivity. The Fascist State with its corporative conception puts the men and their possibilities into productive work, and interprets the duties they have to fulfil.

In this new conception, which has found its logical expression in our representative forms, the citizen is valuable because of his production, his work and his thought, and not only because he is twenty-one years old and has the right to vote!

In the corporative state are reflected all national activities. It was logical that syndicalistic organizations should become a part also of the new representative institutions. From this need, imposed by the new political and social reality, arose the reform of national political representation. Not

only does this new political directorate select its candidates in relation to their capabilities, and the number of citizens represented, but it is complimented by the selection and valuation dedicated by the Great Fascist Council to creating the best, the most stable, the most truly representative and the most expert national board of directors.

We have solved a series of problems of no little entity and importance: we have abolished all the perennial troubles and disorder and doubt that poisoned our national soul. We have given a rhythm, a law, and a protection to work: we have found in the collaboration of classes the reason for our possibilities, for our future power. We do not lose time in troubles, in strikes, which, while they vex the spirit, imperil also our own strength and the solidity of our economy. We consider conflict as a luxury for the rich. We must save strength. We have exalted work as productive strength; therefore we have the majority of these elements represented in the legislative body, and this body is a more worthy and more strong helmsman of Italian life.

And Capital is not exiled as in the Russian communistic dream: we consider it an increasingly important actor in the drama of production.

In this my autobiography I have emphasized more than once the fact that I have always tried to weave the character of an organic and coherent structure into all the fabric of my political work. I have not confined myself to giving merely an outward veneer or contour to Italian life, I wished to influence the depths of its spirit. I founded my labour on facts and the real conditions of the Italian people; from such realistic activity I drew valuable lessons. I have been able to give useful, immediate results, looking toward a new future of our country.

One of the reforms which I have promoted, following it

closely in all its successive developments, is the reorganization of schools; this has been called the Gentile Reform, from the name of the Minister of Public Instruction, appointed by me immediately following the march on Rome. The gravity and importance of school problems cannot escape the attention of any modern statesman mindful of the destiny of his people. The school must be considered in all its complete expression, Public School, Intermediate Schools, University Institutions, all exercise a profound influence on the trend, moral and economic, of the life of any nation. From the beginning this has always been on my mind. Perhaps my early experience as a school-teacher added to an inescapable interest in youth and its development. In Italy there were traditions of higher culture, but the Public School had degraded them because of deficiency of means and above all by lack of spiritual vision.

Although the percentage of illiteracy tended to diminish, even to disappear in certain regions and particularly in Piedmont, the citizens, however, did not get from the school-world those broad bases of educational foundations—physical, intellectual and moral—that are possible and humane. The Intermediate Schools were too crowded, because everybody was admitted even without merit through endless sessions of examinations which were reduced often to a spiritless formality. We lacked intelligent systems of selection and vocational and educational valuation of individuals. A mill ground on and on turning out stock patterns of human beings who mostly ended by taking tasks in bureaucracy. They lowered the function of public service by dead and not living personnel. Universities created some other puppets in the so-called "free arts" as law and medicine.

It was time that the delicate machinery of such consequence in the spiritual life of the Nation should be renewed

by a precise, definite organic form. We had to crowd out from the Intermediate School the negative and supercilious elements. We were determined to infuse into the Public School those broad humanistic currents in which our history and our traditions are rich indeed. Finally, it was indispensable to impose a new discipline in education to which everyone had to submit and the teachers themselves first of all !

To be sure, teachers draw a very modest wage in Italy ; and this is a problem that I have determined will be faced and solved as soon as the condition of the Budget will allow. Nevertheless, I cannot admit a limited pinch-penny treatment of education. Niggardly policy is of old and typically Liberal and Democratic origin. It furnished teachers with a good pretext to perform their duty indifferently and to abandon themselves to subversive thought, even against the State itself. This condition reached a climax in the humiliating fact that many teachers deserted their posts. We had had clamorous examples of such a tendency, not only in the elementary schools, but also in some universities

Fascism put a stop to all this, making discipline supreme ; discipline both for the high and for the low ; particularly for those who had the supreme ability and high duty of teaching order and discipline and of maintaining the highest concepts of human service in the various schools of the Regime.

We had an old school law which took its name from Minister Casati, a law that had been launched in 1859, and had remained the fundamental law even after the successive retouching by Ministers Coppino, Danco, and Credaro. We had to renew and refashion it, under the ardent will of our Party, we had to give it a broad didactic and moral vision, we had to give it a spirit of vital rebirth which would appeal to the new Italy. Great ideas and great revolutions

always create the right hour for the solution of many problems. The School Problem, which had been dragged on for many decades, has finally received its solution with the Gentile Reform. This is not the place to explain the reform in detail. I want to indicate, however, those fundamental lines which I myself discussed and disposed of in a few compact discussions with the Minister of Public Instruction. They can be summarized in the following points:

First. The State furnishes the schooling only to those who deserve it because of their merits, and leaves to other initiatives students who are not entitled to a place in the State's Schools.

This puts on the scrap-heap the democratic concept which considered a State school as an institution for everyone—a basket into which treasure and waste was piled together. The middle class had considered the school at its service and therefore did not respect it. The demand was only for the greatest indulgence possible, to reach as quickly as they could their merely utilitarian purposes such as a degree or a perfunctory passing to promotions.

Second. The students of the State schools and of the independent schools find themselves under equal conditions when taking the State examinations, before committees appointed by the Government.

Thus is encouraged the regime of independent schools analogous to that of England. This regime is advantageous for the Catholics, owners of many schools, but displeases the anti-clericals of old style. It allows me a free development of scholastic initiative outside of the conventional lines.

Third. The State watches over the independent schools and creates a rivalry between independent and State schools which raises the culture and the atmosphere of all schools.

The State does not see its jurisdiction diminishes because

of the independent schools; on the contrary, it extends its watchfulness over all schools.

Fourth. Admission to the Intermediate schools is now made only by examinations. The schools are directed toward a broad humanistic culture, but with a standard of scholarship which eliminated for ever the disorder and the easy-going ways of the old democratic schools.

By means of these and other reforms the elementary school comes to have two distinct, but co-ordinated, purposes; one is the preparation for the Intermediate school, but the other is a high type of broad popular education, complete in itself.

The Intermediate schools were broadened by means of the following institutions:

(*a*) *Complementary schools:* the abolished technical school, complete in itself, was revived on new lines.

(*b*) *Technical Institutes* of higher specialization.

(*c*) *Scientific Lyceum* still higher, taking the place of the abolished "modern Lyceum" and of the Physico-mathematical departments of the Technical Institute, and preparing the students for the scientific branches of the University.

(*d*) *Teachers' Institute,* a merely humanistic and philosophical school taking the place of the abolished complementary and normal Schools.

(*e*) *Womens' Lyceum,* a general culture school and complete in itself.

(*f*) *Classical Lyceum:* is left as before in its essential lines, but augmented by the humanistic character of the studies; to it the task of preparing for most University branches has been assigned. To enter the Universities, admission examinations have been instituted. The final examination of Intermediate schools, of the Classical and Scientific Lyceum, has been called *Maturity Examinations;*

all the curricula have been renewed, fitting them for a more modern culture. Latin has been restored in all schools except in the Complementary and Religious Departments of the elementary and intermediate schools.

For all these different types of institutions, an essential rule has been put into practice, that is, every school must be a *unit organism*, with a set number of classes and students; the candidates may enter through a graduated classification, based on the examinations; those who are not admitted, must go to independent schools.

The applying of this reform which overthrew the old interests, the old ideas and especially the utilitarian spirit of the populations, aroused an unavoidable spirit of ill-feeling. It was used by the Opposition Press, especially by the *Corriere della Sera*, for controversial purposes; but the reform has been put through with energy directed by me, and has marked the beginning of a real rebirth of the Italian school and of Italian culture.

The reform of the Universities has been co-ordinated with the reforms in the primary and intermediate schools. Its purpose is to divide the University students into different organic institutions, without useless overlapping. The rule of State examinations is imposed also for the Universities, to which both the students of the State and independent schools can be admitted. The Institute of "Libera docenza," authorities independently attached to certain faculties of the universities, has also been reformed, not being appointed any longer by the single departments, but by central committees in Rome.

During a visit of the delegations of the Fascist University groups, I had the opportunity of declaring that the Gentile Reform "is the one most revolutionary of all the reforms which we have voted on, because it has completely transformed a condition of things which lasted since 1859."

I was the son of a schoolmistress; I myself had taught in the elementary and secondary schools. I knew, therefore, the school problem. Because of that, I had wished to bring it to its concrete conclusion. The Italian School will take up again its deserved place in the world. From our University chairs, true scientists and poets will again illuminate Italian thought, while secondary schools will give technical and executive elements to our population and the public school will create a background of civic education and collective virtues in the masses.

I have willed that, in collaboration with the Universities, departments of Fascist economics, of corporative law, and a whole series of fruitful institutes of Fascist culture, should be created. Thus a purely scholastic and academic world is being penetrated by Fascism, which is creating a new culture through the fervid and complex activity of real, of theoretical and of spiritual experiences.

But, more than the Institutes of Fascist Universities, closer to my heart is a new institution which has all the new and original marks of the Fascist revolution: it is the National Organization of Balilla. Under the name of a legendary little Genoese hero was organized the new generation of children and of youth. These no longer depend, as in the past, upon various playground associations, scattered political schools, and accessory formations, but are trained through rigid and gay discipline in gymnastic exercise and in the general rules of a well-ordered national life. They are accustomed to obedience and they are made to see a sure vision of the future.

To prove the importance that educational revival has, in my mind, I myself gave a lecture at the University of Perugia. It has been pronounced by scholars as an enlargement of the world's concept of its duty to youth.

Finally, to pay a tribute to culture and to higher culture,



and to everyone that, in the field of science, art and letters, have kept high the name of Italy, I have created an Italian Academy, with a membership of " immortals."

The armed forces of the State had fallen into degradation in the years 1919, 1920, 1921. The flower of our race had been pushed aside and humiliated.

Conditions even reached the point when the Minister of War in those " liberal " days had a circular distributed advising officers not to appear in uniform in public and to refrain from carrying arms in order not to be subjected to challenges of gangsters and hoodlums.

This aberration, which it is better to pass over quickly for the sake of one's country, was destined to find its avenger in Fascism. It was one of the factors which created an atmosphere ardent with passion for change. To-day, the spirit of the country is much different ; to-day the armed forces of the State are justly considered the secure and worthy and honoured defence of the Nation.

I had a very clear and decisive programme, when, in 1922, at the moment of the march on Rome, I selected as my collaborators the best leaders of the Victory of 1918. General Armando Diaz, who after Vittorio Veneto had remained aloof in silence, overwhelmed by the difficulty of the moment, and who had given forth and had been able to voice an indignant protest in the Senate against the policies of Nitti's Cabinet, had been selected by me as Minister of War. I appointed Admiral Thaon de Revel, the greatest leader of our war on the sea, as Minister of the Navy. On January the 5th, 1923, General Diaz presented a complete programme of reform for the Army to the Council of Ministers. That was an historical meeting; fundamental decisions for the renewal of the armed forces were taken ; and we were able to declare to the country in a solemn and explicit fashion that, with that meeting, the

Army was given a new life to "accomplish the high mission that had been entrusted to it, in the supreme interests of the Nation."

I had fulfilled the first promise I had made myself and to the Italian people. Immediately after that I dedicated myself to a reorganization of aviation, which had been abandoned to the most complete decay by the former administrations. The task was not easy; everything had to be done again. The landing fields, the machines, the pilots, the organizers, and the technicians all were restored. A feeling of abandonment, of dejection, mistrust had been diffused in Italy by the enemies of aviation; this new kind of armed force, many people thought, should be only developed as a sport. Into this situation I put my energy. I gave even personal performance and devotion. I have succeeded in my purpose; the successes of De Pinedo, of Maddalena, the flights in squadrons, the great manœuvres, have demonstrated that recently Italian aviation has acquired great agility and prestige, not only in Italy, but wherever there is air to fly in.

The same can be said of the Navy, which has reordered its formation, bettered its units, completed its fleet, and made its discipline efficient. Fourth, but not least, by its spirit of emulation and daring, comes the Voluntary Militia for the safety of the Nation, divided into 160 Legions, commanded by distinguished officers and by enthusiastic Fascists. These are magnificent shock troops.

Finally, our barracks and our ships can be said to be, in the true sense of the word, refuges of peace and strength; the officers dedicate their activities to the physical and educational bettering of the men; the training conforms to the modern technique of war. The Army is no longer distracted from its functions, as happened too often under the old Governments, to assume ordinary duties of public order

which were exhausting and humiliating, and to which entire divisions were assigned. I changed all this. For the last five years the Army left its barracks for its tactical manœuvres and for no other reason.

After some time, General Diaz had been obliged to resign on account of the condition of his health. General Di Giorgio commanded during an interim. But afterwards I saw clearly the necessity of gathering all the armed forces of the State under one direction. I assumed then the portfolios of War, Navy and Aeronautics. In consequence of this programme I have created a commander-in-chief of all general staffs, who has the task of preparing with a complete vision of ensemble all the plans of the various branches of our forces with one end, Victory. Our military spirit is lively ; it is not aggressive, but it will not be taken by surprise. It is a peaceful spirit, but it is watchful.

To complete the revival of Fascism, it was necessary to keep in mind also several lesser problems which, for the dignity and strength of the life of the Nation, were in need of an immediate solution.

The retired employees of the Government, who received very small pensions before the War, had, with alarm, seen the value of their already meagre resources diminish because of the successive depreciation of the currency. I had to make a provision of exceptional character for their protection, by making their pensions adequate for the necessities of the day and for the value of money. I made a provision favouring the clergy also ; it was a question of a just and necessary disposition. This would have been inconceivable at the time of the Masonic demagogy and social democracy which was dominated by a superficial and wrathful anti-clericalism. Our clergy number about 60,000 in Italy. They are extraneous to the controversy, which I may call historical, between State and Church. They accomplish

a wise task and assist the Italian people in all their religious practices, without meddling with political questions, especially since the rise of Fascism. They are reluctant now to denature the spiritual character of their mission. The intriguing priest, of course, has to be fought. The priest, instead, who accomplishes his task according to the wise rules of the Gospel and shows the people the great humane and divine truths, will be helped and assisted. Because many of them lived in poverty, we took measures of general character to better the conditions of their existence.

The policy of public works in Italy had always had an electoral character; works to be done were decided here and there, not according to an organic plan and to any plain necessity, but to give sporadic satisfaction to this or that group of voters. I stopped this legalized favouritism. I instituted Bureaus of Public Works, entrusting them to persons in whom I have complete confidence, who obey only the central powers of the State, and are immune from pressure by local interests. In this way I was able to better sensibly the conditions of the roads of the south; I mapped out a programme for aqueducts, railroads and ports. All that is just, finds in the Italian bureaucracy an immediate comprehension. All the offices of governmental character have received a new impulse and new prestige. The great Public Utilities of the State, railroads, mail, telegraph, telephone, the monopolies, function again. Some persons are even sarcastic about the new regularity. And this is easily explained—we should not forget that the Italian people has been for many years rebellious to any discipline, it was accustomed to use its easy-to-hand and clamorous complaints against the work and action of the Government. Some remnants of the mental attitudes of the bygone days still come up to the surface and even whine because there is efficiency and order in the world. Certain individ-

ualistic ambitions would slap at our strong achievements of discipline and regularity. But to-day the State is not an abstract and agnostic entity; the Government is present everywhere, every day. Who lives in the ambit of the State, or outside the State, lives and feels in every way the majesty of law. It is not a thing of small account that all Public Utilities are conducted with an efficiency which I might call American, and that the Italian Bureaucracy, proverbially slow, has become eager and agile.

I have given particular attention to the Capital. Rome is a universal city, dear to the heart of Italians and to the whole world. It was great at the time of the Roman Empire and has conserved a universal light. It was the historical seat and the centre of diffusion of Christianity. Rome is first of all a city with the aura of destiny and history. It is the Capital of the New Italy. It is the seat of Christianity. It has taught and will teach law and art to the whole world. I could not refuse the resources necessary to make this magnificent Capital a city esthetically beautiful, politically ordered and disciplined by a governor. With its natural port of Ostia, with its new roads it will become one of the most orderly and clean cities of Europe. By isolating the monuments of ancient Rome, the relation between ancient Romans and the Italians is made more beautiful and suggestive. This work of revaluation and almost re-creation of the Capital was not made with detriment to other Italian cities. Each one of them has the typical characters of ancient capitals. They are cities like Perugia, Milan, Naples, Florence, Palermo, Bologna, Turin, Genoa, which have had a sovereign history worthy of high respect; but, none of them think now to contest with Rome and its eternal glory.

Some writers who, as keen observers, have followed point by point the vicissitudes of our political life, at a certain

moment raised an interesting question. Why did the National Fascist Party not decree its own disbandment or slip into disorganization after the revolutionary victory of October 1922?

To be able to answer this question it is necessary to bring into relief certain essential points. History teaches us that, normally, a revolutionary movement can be channelled into legality only by means of forceful provisions directed, if necessary, against even the personnel of the movement. Every revolution assumes unforeseen and complex aspects; in certain historical hours, the sacrifice of those who were the well-deserving lieutenants of yesterday might become indispensable for the supreme interest to-morrow. Nevertheless, in my own life I have never deliberately desired the sacrifice of anyone; therefore I have made use of the high influence which I have always had over my adepts, to stop stagnation or heresies, personal interests and contentions: I have preferred to prevent rather than to repress.

But, when it has been necessary, I have shown myself to be inexorable. In fact, I had to keep in mind that, when one Party has shouldered the responsibility of all power, it has to know how to perform surgery, and major operations too, against secession. Because of my personal situation, in having created the Party, I have always dominated it. The sporadic cases of secession due not to differences of method, but to personal temperament, usually withered under the general loss of esteem and interest and by disclosure of selfish ends.

This consciousness of my incontestable domination has given me the ability to make the Party live on. But also other reasons were opposed to the disbandment of the Party. First of all, a sentimental motif had stamped itself upon my soul and upon the grateful spirit of the Nation.

The Fascisti, the young particularly, had followed me with blind, absolute, and profound devotion. I had led them through the most dramatic vicissitudes, taking them away from Universities, from jobs, from factories. The young men had not hesitated when confronted by danger. They had known how to risk their future positions together with their lives and fortunes. I owed and owe to the militiamen of previous days my strongest gratitude ; to disband the Party and retire would have been first of all an act of utter ingratitude.

There was in the end a much more important reason. I considered the formation of a new Italian ruling method as one of the principal duties of Fascism. It would be created by the vigour of labour, through a well-experimented process of selection, without the risky creation of too many improvised military leaders. It was the Party's right to offer me the men of our own regime to take positions of responsibility. In that sense the Party was side by side with the Government in the ruling of the new regime. It had to abandon the programme of violent struggle and yet conserve intact its character of proud political intransigence. Many evident signs made me understand that it was not possible to patch the old with the new world. I had therefore need of reserves of men for the future. The chief of the Government could very well be the chief of the Party, just as in every country of the world a representative chief is always the exponent of an aristocracy of wills.

In the meantime, to mark a fundamental point for the public order, my Government in December 1922 gave an admonition to the Fascists themselves. It was in the following terms :

" Every Fascisti must be a guardian of order. Every disturber is an enemy even if he carries in his pocket the identification card of the Party."

Thus, in a few words, the position and the duty of the Party in the life of the Fascist regime were indicated.

We had plenty of pitfalls and snares in 1922. The Party had reached a peculiar sensitiveness through its intense experience. In the moment of its hardest test, it had shown itself to be equipped to guide the interests of the country as a whole. The Revolution had not had long bloody consequences, as in other revolutions, except for the moment of battle. Violence, as I have said before, had been controlled by my will.

Nevertheless, the position of some opposing newspapers was strange indeed. That of the *Corriere della Sera* of Liberal-Democratic colouring, and that of the *Avanti*, Socialist, agreed—strange bedfellows!—in harshly criticising the simultaneous and violent action of Fascism, while they wished in their hearts and wrote that the Fascista experiment would be finished. According to these political diagnosticians, it was a matter of an experiment of short duration, in which Fascism would be destroyed either on parliamentary rocks or by the obvious insufficiency to direct the complexities of Italian life. We saw later the wretched end of these prophets; but to reach results it had been necessary for me, particularly in the first year, to continually watch the Party. It must always remain in perfect efficiency, superior to opposing critics and snares, ready for orders and commands.

One grave danger was threatening the Party—it was too numerous admissions of new elements. Our small handfuls in the warlike beginnings were now growing to excess, so much so that it was necessary to put a padlock on the door to prevent the influx of further membership. Once the solidity of Fascism had been proven, all the old world wanted to rush into its ranks. If this had happened, we would have come back to the old mentality and defects

by mere overhaste in adulteration instead of keeping our growth selective through education and devotedness. Otherwise the Party, augmented by all the opportunists of the eleventh hour, would have lost its vibrating and original soul. A stop had to be put to the old world. It could go and wait with its bed-slippers on, without spoiling a movement of young people for Italian rebirth.

After I had closed, in 1926, the registration in the Party, I used all my force, care and means for the selection and the education of Youth. The Avanguardia was then created, together with the Opera Nazionale Balilla, the organization for boys and girls which, because of its numerous merits and the high value of its educational activities, I have chosen even recently to call " The invaluable pupil of the Fascista Regime."

This programme brought forth unparalleled results ; due to it the Party has never encountered a really serious crisis. I believe that there can be counted among my qualities one of being able to act in good season and to strike at the right moment without false sentimentality where the shadow of a weakness or of a trap is hidden.

In this watchful work of prevention I have always had at my side good Secretaries of the Party who have helped me no end. Michele Bianchi had already led the Party with ability until the march on Rome. He had been able to balance the particularly violent character of the movement with the demands of political situations which had reality and must be ended with wisdom. Michele Bianchi has been an excellent political secretary for this very reason, and to-day he is still with the Government, as my very appreciated collaborator in internal politics. He has a political mind of the first order, a reflective mind ; he is faithful at every hour. The Regime can count on him every time.

Honourable Sansanelli, a courageous participant in the late War, and to-day President of the International Federation of World War Veterans, took his place. Hon. Sansanelli has been able to face vague secessionist movements, which revealed an origin undoubtedly to be found in one peculiar pre-Fascist Italian political Masonry.

There was in that period a reprisal by anti-Fascist forces. The old Liberal world, defeated, but tolerated by the generosity of the Regime, was not exactly aware of the new order of things. It regained its wonted haughtiness; Italian Masonry was still developing, with its infinite and uncontrollable tentacles, its practices of corruption and of dissolution. These forces of negation even armed the Communist remnants in the obscurity of ambushes and cellars. A new *direttorio*, presided over by the Secretary Hon. Giunto, until September 1924, was formed after the elections. I have already spoken of the Fascist activity of Hon. Giunto. In the second semester of that year, the anti-Fascist movement, aroused by obscure National and International forces, showed itself with growing intensity on all fronts. I cast it down on to its nose with my speech of January the third, 1925. But also following that I willed that a line of more combative intransigence should be imposed by our Party: and with this duty in mind, on February 12, 1925, I appointed Hon. Roberto Farinacci, General Secretary of the Party.

Farinacci knew how to be worthy of the task with which I had entrusted him. His accomplishments, considered in their entirety and in the results obtained, were those of a well-deserving Secretary. He broke up the residues of the *aventinismo* which had remained here and there in the country; he gave a tone of high and cutting intransigence not only political, but also moral, to the whole Party, invoked against offenders and plotters those exceptional

laws which I had promulgated after four attempted assassinations had demonstrated the criminality of anti-Fascism. I was closely following this movement of vigorous reprisal of the Party and had prepared in time the necessary provisions. The Hon. Farinacci is one of the founders of Italian Fascism. He has faithfully followed me from 1914.

After his task had been accomplished, Hon. Farinacci left the position of Secretary-General to the Hon. Augusto Turatti, courageous veteran of the World War, a man of clear mind and aristocratic temperament, who has been able to give the Party the style of the new times and the consciousness of the new needs. Hon. Turatti has accomplished a great and indispensable work of educational improvement of the Fascist masses. Besides these precious elements in the high positions of the Party of to-day, I must mention Hon. Renato Ricci for the organization of the "Balilla," Melchiorri for the Militia; Marinelli, a courageous administrative secretary; Starrace, a valorous veteran, and Arpinati, a faithful Black Shirt from March 1919 and a founder of Fascism in Bologna.

The Party has given me new prefects for Fascist Italy, elements for syndical organization, consuls, while various deputies have been appointed Ministers and Under-Secretaries. Little by little, proceeding by degrees, I have given an always more integral and intransigent line to the whole world of Government. Almost all positions of command have been to-day cntrusted to Fascist elements. Thus after four years of Regime we have actuated the formula: "All the Power to all Fascism," which I launched in June 1925 at a Fascist meeting in Rome.

I have controlled my impatience. I have avoided leaps into darkness. I do not sleep my way to conclusions. I have blended the pre-existing needs with the formation of a future. Naturally, giving to the State a complete Fascist

character and filling all the ganglia of National life with the vitality and newer force of faithful Black Shirts, I not only did not detract from, but added always to the importance of the National Fascist Party as the force of the Regime. This transposition from political organization to the permanent organization of a State guarantee is in the most solid manner the future of the Regime. I have laid with my own hands the corner-stone of representative reform based on the interests of Italian unity and cosmos, and I have arranged that the Grand Fascist Council become a definite constitutional organ for the constancy of the State. Thus the Fascist Party, while remaining independent, is bound by ties of steel to the very essence of the new Fascist State.

A theme that is always interesting and often misconceived, both among Italians and foreigners, is that of the relations between State and Church in Italy. The Law of the Guarantees in 1870, by which the question was believed to be solved, remains a form of relationship which has not caused since the rise of Fascism friction of any great significance. To be sure the Holy See renews, once in a while, protestations for the supposed rights usurped in Rome by the Italian State, but there are no substantial motives of apprehension nor profound divergencies.

This serenity of relations is a tribute to the Fascist Regime. In the past a legend had blossomed around dissensions of historical character tending to foment partisan hatreds: an anti-clerical activity had been developed for a long time in various forms, and it served, through many sections of the so-called "Free-thought" groups, to augment the nefarious political influence of our form of Masonry. The idea that religion was a "private affair" was diffused, and religion was not admitted to any form of public act.

If, however, anti-clericalism was superficial and coarse, on the other hand, the Church, with its incomprehenions

of the new Italy, with the tenacity of its intransigent position had only exasperated its opponents. Anti-church forces even went so far as to ban every Catholic symbol and even Christian doctrine from the schools. These were periods of Socialist-Masonic audacity. It was necessary that ideas should be cleared. We had to distinguish and separate the principles of political clericalism from the vital essence of Catholic faith. The situation as it had stood caused, in Italy, dangerous deviations, which went from the policy of "abstaination" between 1870 and 1900 to that popular party of baleful memories destined to degenerate little by little until 1925 into a form of clerical Bolshevism, which I resolutely liquidated and put into political and intellectual bankruptcy.

This troubled atmosphere, infested by misunderstandings and superficialities, has been relieved by Fascism. I did not deceive myself as to the seriousness of the crisis which is always open between State and Church: I had not fooled myself into thinking that I would be able to cure a dissension which involves the highest interests and principles, but I had made a deep study of those lines of set directions and inflexible temperaments which, if softened, were destined to make the principle of religious faith, religious observance, and respect for the forms of worship bloom again, independent of political controversies. They are, in fact, the essential factors of the moral and civic development of a country which is renewing itself.

To be sincere I must add that high circles of the Vatican have not always been known to appreciate my work, possibly for political reasons, and have not helped me in the steps which appeared wise for all. My labour had not been easy nor light; our Masonry had drawn a most intricate net of anti-religious activity; it dominated the currents of thought; it exercised its influence over

publishing houses, over teaching, over administration of justice, and even over certain dominating parts of the armed forces.

To give an idea of how far things had gone, this significant example is sufficient. When, in Parliament, I pronounced my first speech of November 16, 1922, after the Fascist revolution, I concluded by invoking the assistance of God in my difficult task. Well, this sentence of mine seemed to be out of place! In the Italian Parliament, a field of action of Italian Masonry, the name of God had been banned for a long time. Not even the Popular Party—the so-called Catholic Party, had ever thought of speaking of God. In Italy, a political man did not even turn his thought to the Divinity. And, even if he had ever thought of it, political opportunism and cowardice would have prevented him, particularly in a legislative assembly. It remained for me to make this bold innovation! And in an intense moment of revolution. What is the truth? It is that a faith openly professed is a sign of strength.

I have seen the religious spirit bloom again: Churches once more are crowded, the ministers of God are themselves surrounded by new respect. Fascism had done, and is doing, its duty.

Some ecclesiastical circles have not shown, as I have said, ability to value and understand, in all its importance, the political and moral rebirth of new Italy.

One of the first symptoms of such incomprehension was exhibited at the beginning of Fascist rule: at first the so-called Catholic Party wanted to collaborate, by having some members in the Government, in the new Regime. This collaboration, however, began to lead us through a series of reticences and misunderstandings, and after six months I was forced to show the door to the ministers belonging to that Party.

I have seen the Popular Party allied with Masonry. But when parties have not clashed on the Italian political scene, the troubles between State and Church have had reflections in international politics. The Roman Question has been once more under discussion. Both historical forces have strengthened their concepts. Journalistic controversies and objective discussions have demonstrated that the problem was not ripe and may be insoluble. Perhaps two mentalities and two worlds are confronting each other in a century-old historical and impractical opposition : one has its roots in the religion of the Fathers and lives by the ethical forces of the *Civis Romanus ;* the other has the universal character of equality of brothers in God.

To-day, with the highest loyalty, Fascism understands and values the Church and its strength : such is the duty of every Catholic citizen. But politics, the defence of national interests, the battles over ourselves and others, must be the work of the modern Fascist Italians who want to see respected the immortal and irreplaceable Church of Saint Peter, and do not wish ever to confound themselves with any political force which has no disclosed outline and knows no patriotism. Whatever the errors of its representatives may be, nobody thinks of taking away from the Church its universal character, but everybody is right in complaining about certain disavowals of some Italian Catholics and may justly resent political approval of certain middle-European currents, upon which Italy places even now her most ample reservations. Faith in Italy has been strengthened. Fascism gives impulse and vigour to the religion of the Country. But it will never be able for any reason to renounce the sovereign rights of the State and of the functions of the State.

# CHAPTER X

## EN ROUTE

SOME readers of my autobiographic record may attribute to these pages of mine the character of a completed life-story. If they have believed that story completed they are mistaken. It is absurd to believe that one can conclude a life of battles at the age of forty-five.

Detailed memoirs of intimate and personal character are the attributes of old age and the chimney-corner. I have no intention of writing any memoirs. They only represent the consciousness of a definite completed cycle. They do not appear of much importance to a man who is in the most vigorous ardour of his activities !

I was the leader of the revolution and chief of the Government at thirty-nine. Not only have I not finished my job, but I often feel that I have not even begun it.

The better part comes toward me. I go toward it at this moment. However, I take pride in affirming that I have laid solid foundations for the building of Fascism. Many ask me what will be my policy in the future, and where lies my final objective.

My answers are here. I ask nothing for myself, nor for mine : no material goods, no honours, no testimonials, no resolutions of approval which presume to consecrate me to History. My objective is simple ; I want to make Italy great, respected, and feared ; I want to render my Nation worthy of her noble and ancient traditions. I want to accelerate her evolution towards the highest forms of

national co-operation, I want to make a greater prosperity always possible for the whole people. I want to create a political organization to express, to guarantee and to safeguard our development. I am tireless in my wish to see newly born and newly reborn Italians. With all my strength, with all my energies, without pause, without interruptions I want to bring to them their fullest opportunities. I do not lose sight of the experience of other peoples, but I build with elements of our own and in harmony with our own possibilities, with our traditions, and with the energy of the Italian people. I have made a profound study of the interests, the aspirations and the tendencies of our masses. I push on toward better forces of life and progress. I value them, I launch them, I guide them. I desire our Nation to conquer again, with Fascist vigour, some decades or perhaps a century of lost history. Our garrison is the Party, which has demonstrated its unreplaceable strength. I have trust in young people. Their spiritual and material life is led by attentive quick minds and by ardent hearts. I do not reject advice, even from opponents, whenever they are honest. I cover with my contempt, dishonest and lying opponents, slanderers, deniers of the Country, and everyone who drowns every sense of dignity, every sentiment of National and human solidarity in the filthy cesspool of low grudges. Defeated ones who cluck to the wind, survivors of a building which toppled for ever, accomplices in the ruin and shame in which the Country was going to be dragged, sometimes do not even have the dignity of silence.

I am strict with my most faithful followers. I always intervene where excesses and intemperances are revealed. I am near to the heart of the masses and listen to its beats, I read its aspiration and interests. I know the virtue of the race. I probe at its purity and soundness. I will fight

vice and degeneration and will put them down. The so-called " liberal institutions," created at other times because of a fallacious appearance of protection, are destroyed and unmasked of their phrases and false idealisms by the new force of Fascism with its idealism planted on realities.

Air and light, strength and energy, shine and vibrate in the infinite sky of Italy! A most lofty civil and National vision leads to-day to its goal this people, which lives in its great new springtime. It animates my long labours. I am forty-five and I feel the vigour of my work and my thought. I have annihilated in myself every egotism: I, like the most devoted of citizens, place upon myself and on every beat of my heart service to the Italian people. I proclaim myself their servant. I feel that all Italians understand and love me; I know that only he is loved who leads without weaknesses, without deviation, and with disinterest and full faith.

Therefore going over what I have already done, I know that Fascism, being a creation of the Italian race, has met and will meet historical necessities, and so unconquerable is destined to give its indelible impression to the twentieth century of history.

# INDEX



## B



## C

D



E



F

K



L



M

N



O

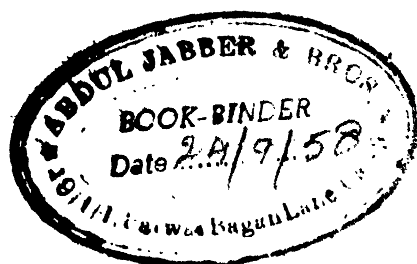


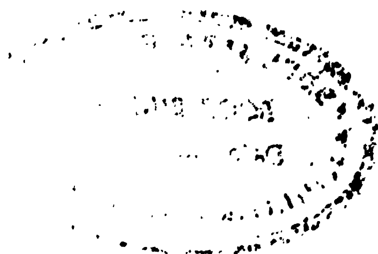
P

R



S






945/MUS
26067